

POLITICAL PARABLES



FOREWORD

Political Parables was the last of three cartoon books I wrote, illustrated, printed and distributed myself many years ago when living and working in Glasgow. In fact, it was through writing this work that I came to realise I needed to find out more if I wanted to give an adequate picture of what Jesus was up to.

I was already aware Jesus had to be described both as a revolutionary - a point Luke makes clear in his own way (Lk 1. 50 - 53) - and as a non-violent - a fact I alluded to myself when portraying him as wielding a knife... but only to peel potatoes for his Mum! (See p. 71) The problem, and I quickly realised it was a huge problem, lay in holding 'revolution' and 'non-violence' together since they appear diametrically opposed.

At this point it became only too clear to me that if I wanted to portray Jesus as he really was I had to discover in the Bible the ideology in which these two ideas are held together, inextricably combined, and which Jesus himself sought to embody.

For an account of that voyage of discovery you will have to turn to my later works. Here, however, you can enjoy a reprint of Political Parables: the 1980 point of departure. However, one word of explanation before you proceed: My first two cartoon books were entitled Digging Up Parables Volumes 1 and 2. This explains why in Political Parables I portrayed myself in a woolly hat and gloves wielding a gardening fork.



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INTRODUCTION

Everyone has heard of Jesus but many people find that what he said makes little sense in today's world. His parables especially have been used so often to drive home moral points that people, naturally, no longer want to know about them.

But by applying what Jesus said to personal morality we have led ourselves up the garden path. What Jesus was on about was not morality but rather life or what we more usually call politics - the whole gamut of relationships that make up society.

The snag is, in order to understand what he was saying, we therefore have to understand a lot about the relationships that made up the society of his own day and that is too much to expect of most people.

So, in this book I have tried to put the parables in an equivalent 20th. century context. The details of this 'translation' should not be taken too seriously. What is important is to pin down the social attitudes that Jesus was attacking - attitudes as common today as in Jesus' own time.



Jesus - a young man of thirty - exploded on the scene with this announcement:

I call on society to break with its present ways; on all of you to change your attitudes drastically, for god's revolutionary society is about to begin.

This is the year of jubilation. All debts and all fines should be cancelled; All land and property should be redistributed, and everyone given a house and a piece of land as his by right.

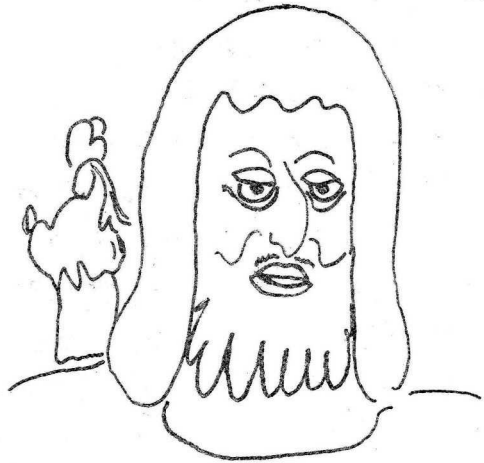
My business is to open people's eyes; to release those who have become victims of this society and to tell the ordinary exploited people the great news of God's revolution.

Lk 4.18,19

At the same time in his contacts with people Jesus brought them amazing relief.



One thing people noticed was that unlike the leaders of society, Jesus spoke and acted as if he knew what life was about. Compared with him, others seemed lacking in weight.



Mk 1. 22

Another thing people noticed
was that wherever Jesus went
trouble and commotion arose.



The reason
is not hard
to understand.

In one way
or another
the Roman
authorities...

...the Jewish
civil and
religious
leaders...

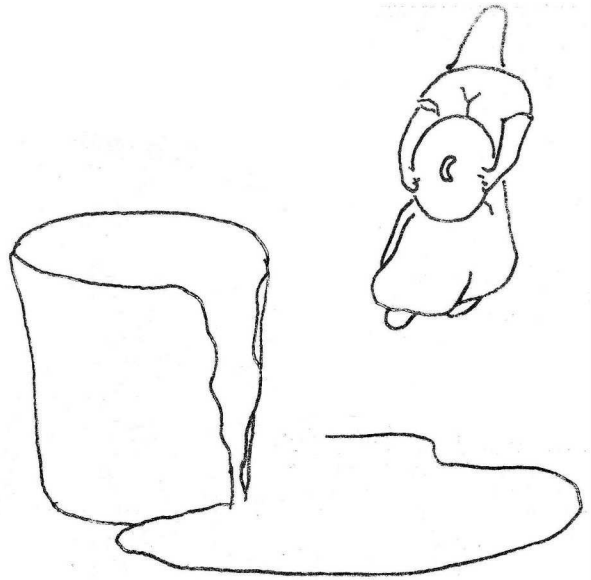
and the Jewish
nationalists
and so called
revolutionaries...

...were all
doing their
best to try and
keep the lid on.



Whereas Jesus' announcement of God's revolutionary society implied going around 'taking the lid off'.

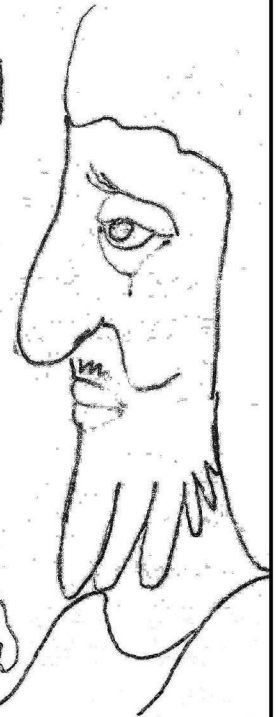
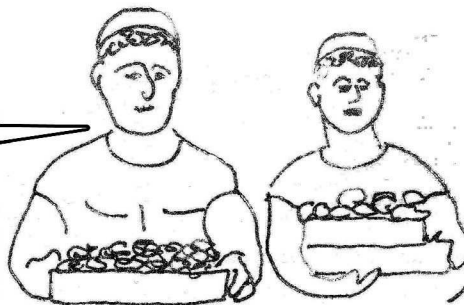
Not surprisingly, trouble spilled out as in the following incident




CAPERNAUM COOP

Where are you going with all that ripe fruit, lads?

We're taking them to the incinerator. The manager wants room made for the new stock



Mk. 3.1-6



Take them to the back streets
and see that they are given
to those who need them!

Hey! Where are you going with those?

Just carry on
lads and do
as I say!

See here, I
heard that! I'm
holding you responsible
for encouraging them
to break the law.

Tell me, my good man, is the law
designed to prevent people doing
good or to prevent them doing harm?

Hell and Damn!
It's my bloody fruit, No?
Who the hell does he
think ...

Damn !

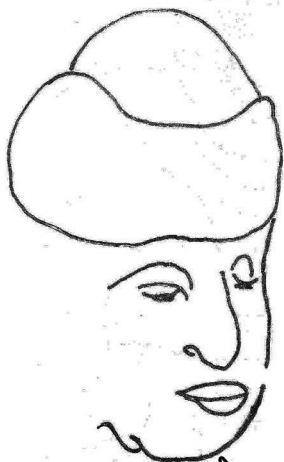
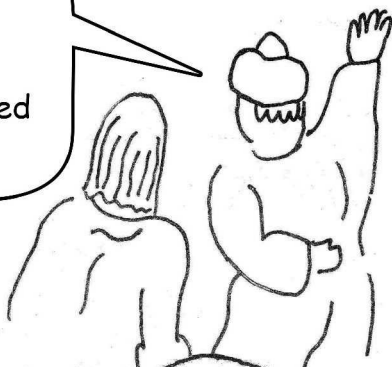
Damn !

Damn !

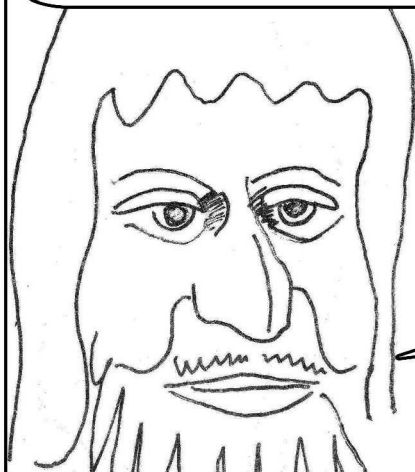
Damn !



I don't understand you Jesus! I can't see why society should give handouts in social benefit and security to the sick, the unemployed and those with large families.



That only encourages people to become layabouts. The money would be better spent: used to encourage those who want to work !



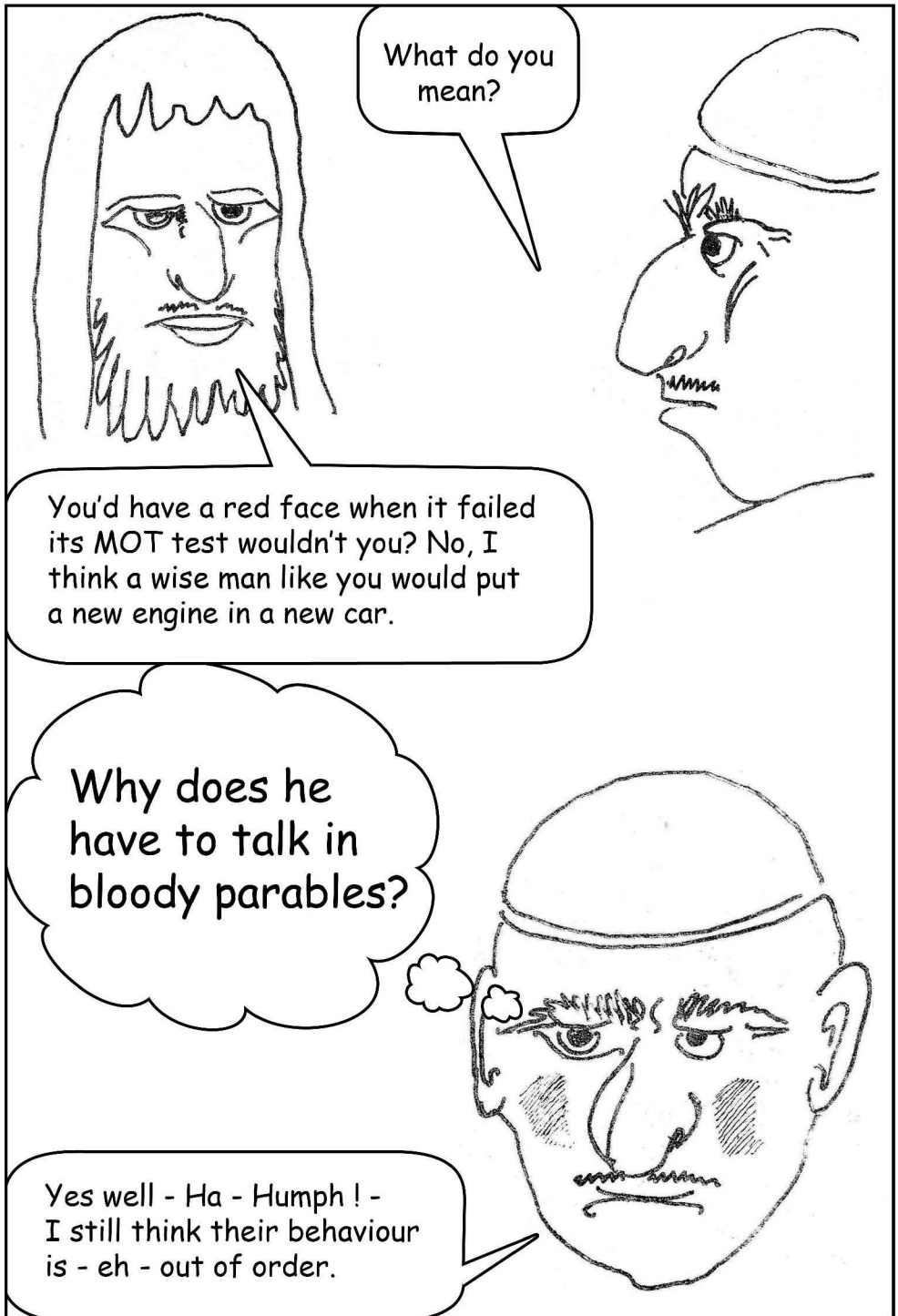
Tell me Jonas. Do you pay the doctor to visit your children who are well or to visit the one who is sick?

Mk. 2. 13-17





Mk. 2.18-22



Ah Jesus, just the man we wanted to see !
It's come to our attention that some of
your men are working on their rest days -



So instead of coming
in fresh to work for us
they turn up tired and
jaded.Just thought
we'd mention it. That way
you can speak to them
about it.

Mk 2. 23-28

Tell me friends - were rest periods introduced for the benefit of you employers or for the benefit of your employees?



AHEM !
AHEM !

TAP! TAP!
TAP!

You seem to have missed the - eh - point.
However, it wasn't that important.

Impudent young pup !

Don't worry. We'll soon
straighten him out.
No sweat !

In this way Jesus soon made
a name for himself amongst
the local gentry...

TROUBLEMAKER !



Matters eventually came to a head when a group of lawyers, down from the capital, publicly denounced Jesus, accusing him of going about publicising society's defects because he wanted to destroy it.

So people think that I go about pointing out defects because I want to destroy society. Is that right?



Mk. 3,22-26

You know that doctors have a knack of getting people who have swallowed poison to vomit it up again. What would you say if someone told you they did this in order to hurt their patients?



Made to look like ten-year-olds !

We did tell you he was an awkward man to handle.



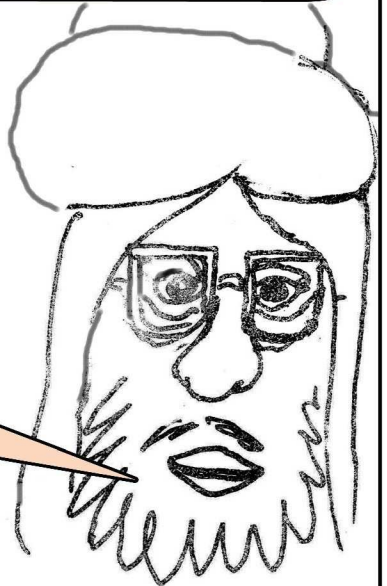
Just a moment. You may be thinking those lawyers who were out to get Jesus were **bad** men.



But, if so, you miss the point which has absolutely nothing to do with whether they were good or bad.



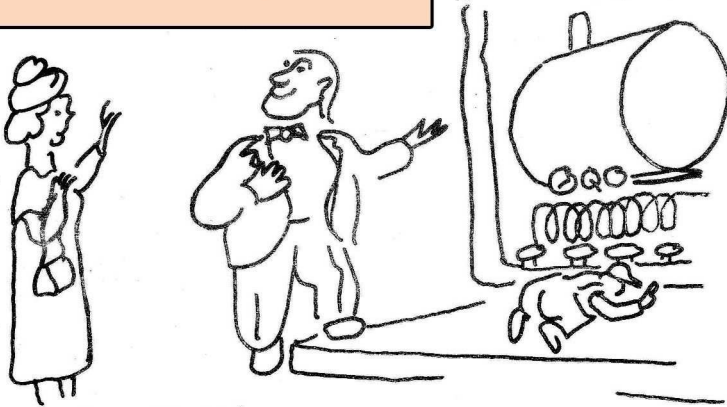
Some may have been good according to our standards, others bad. But in any case what is important is that they all had similar **attitudes** - due to their having similar positions within the society of their day



All of them were leaders of society and so had what we call managerial attitudes



I'm sure you all know this managerial attitude - but let me remind you of it.



People organising and running society (the managers) are usually convinced they are doing a grand job.

So they get quite upset when someone points to things going wrong,...

a feeling which increases, given publicity.

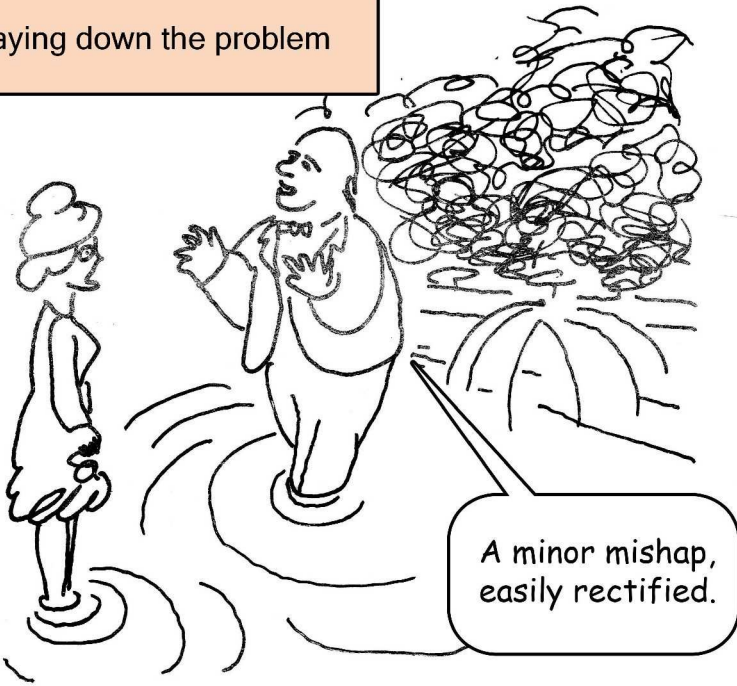


Confronted with such a situation managers tend to concentrate on symptoms.



Mr Smith.
This company no longer requires your services !

While playing down the problem



You are certainly familiar with this managerial attitude. But can you now see that its consequences are that when people like Jesus come along, exposing symptoms and making the public aware of the problems, 'managers' like those Jerusalem lawyers 'do their nut'; their instinct being to suppress symptoms and hush up problems? They naturally see people like Jesus, who 'take the lid off', as having subversive political motives.



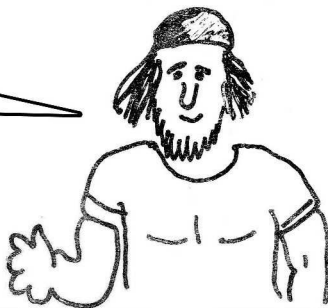


So don't go away thinking that those Jerusalem lawyers were just bad men. They weren't. They were just like 99.9 % of managers today: acting in accordance with this managerial attitude.

Jesus' decision to go about exposing the problems of first century Palestinian society bothered not only the managers of society but also, strangely enough, the nationalist revolutionaries as well. They had been very interested in Jesus' announcement of the coming of God's revolutionary society. However, they expected immediate results, along the line of a revolutionary take-over, and they were thoroughly put out by Jesus' lack of action in this respect.

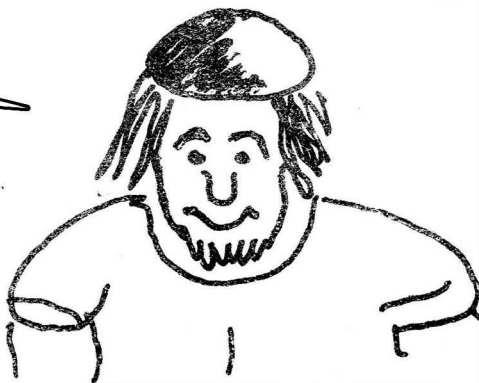


Why hang around messing about with people's personal problems when you could be taking over and introducing God's revolution right away?



Think about it this way. There's this big house full of everything in plenty, clothes, furniture, food, even money and jewels. The door is in front of you lying wide open. What do you do?

Go in and help myself !

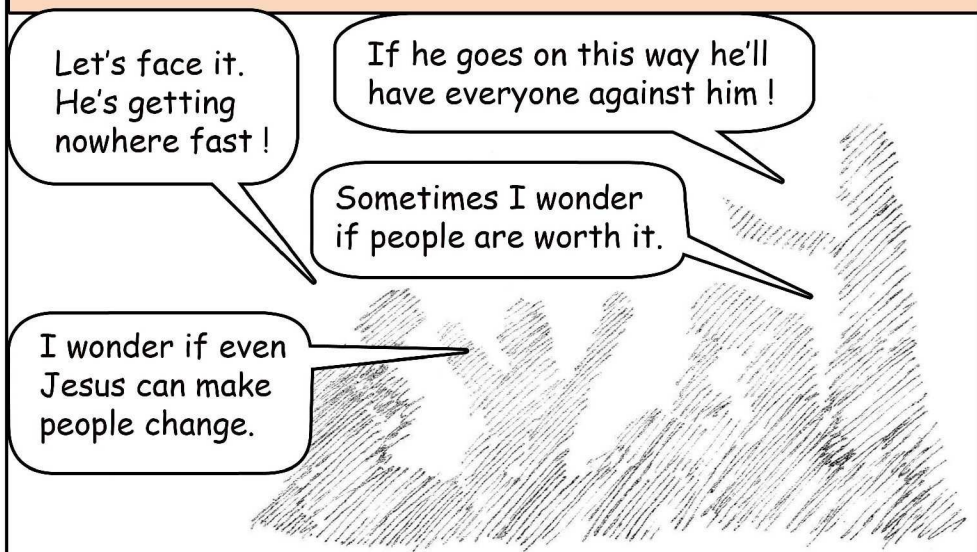


Ah but wait a minute. There's this big fellow who owns the place standing there, six feet six inches high and as broad as he is tall. What about him?

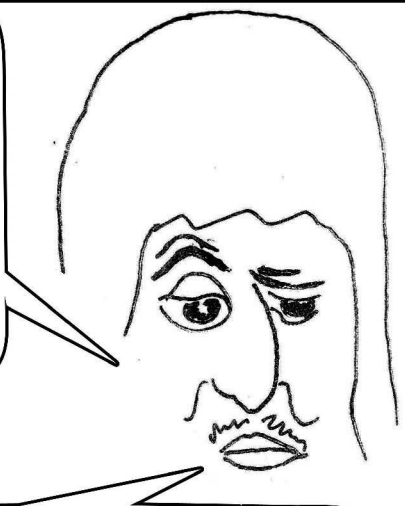
Mk. 3.27



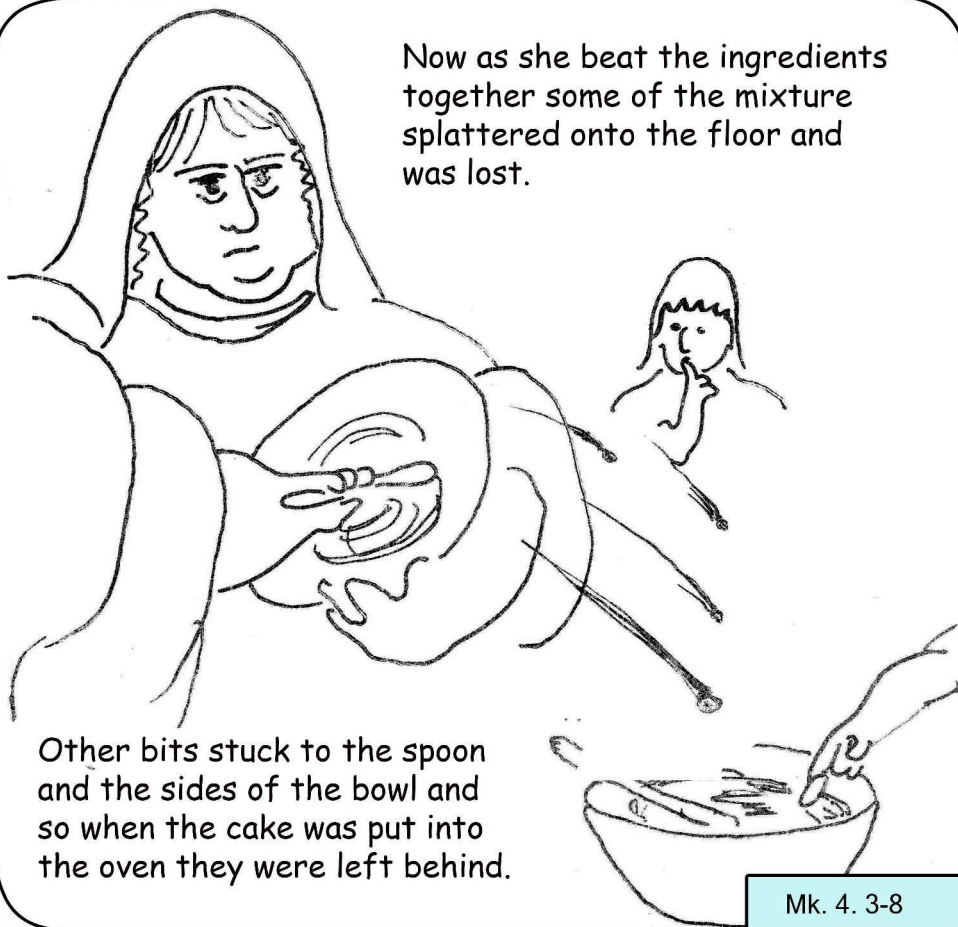
It wasn't just outsiders who were anxious about the way things seemed to be going. Many of Jesus' men were worried both by the open hostility of the small minority who ran society and by the half-heartedness of many ordinary people



What! You want me to double back on my tracks simply because people are apathetic and because a handful of nobs start saying rude things of me? Let me give you a parable. There was this woman who started to make a cake.

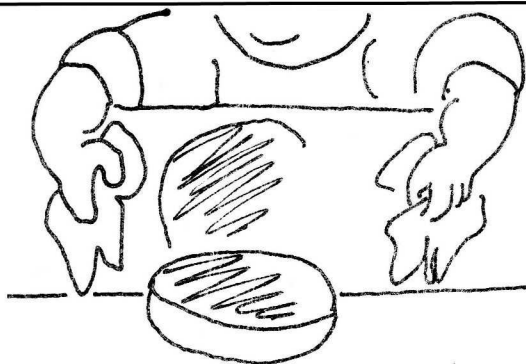


Now as she beat the ingredients together some of the mixture splattered onto the floor and was lost.

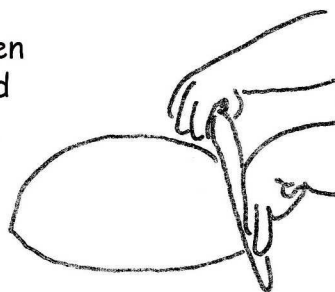


Other bits stuck to the spoon and the sides of the bowl and so when the cake was put into the oven they were left behind.

Mk. 4. 3-8



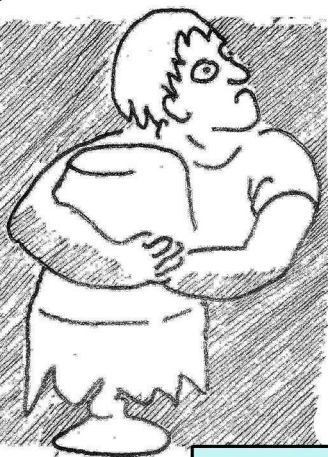
Yet other bits got fixed to the oven plate. So when the cake was turned out they were broken off and lost. Other bits still were slightly burnt and the woman cut them off too.



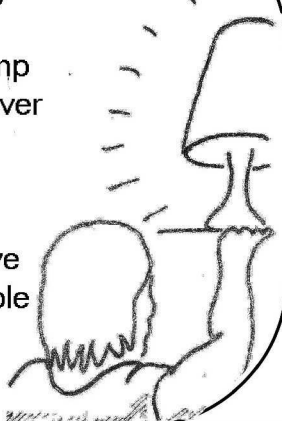
However, in spite of all of this waste, when the woman came to put the cake on the table there was more than enough for everyone to eat.

Jesus had friends as well as enemies among the gentry.
One of them came to remonstrate with him.

Jesus, forgive me, I know you mean well but you're pushing it too hard. You've managed to upset a number of important people. I'm sure if you took the trouble to explain things tactfully you would find them really quite receptive.



Nicodemus, my friend, if you switch on a lamp do you then cover it with a cloth? No you put it somewhere where it will give light to the whole room !

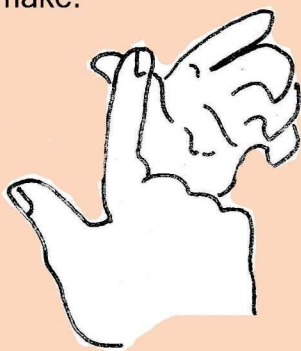


Mk. 4.26

After this Jesus' henchmen came to him with a question:

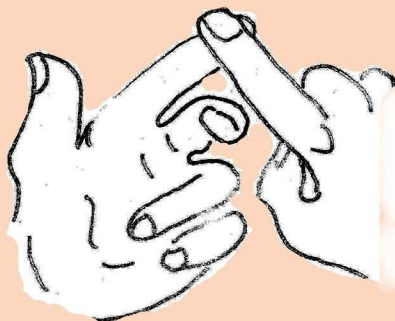


Jesus, we have this problem. We take the points you make.

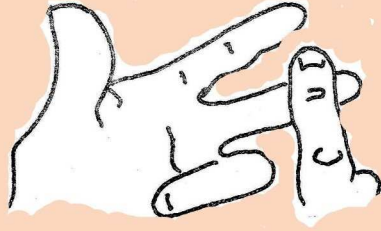


First: That there's more to revolution than taking over power

Second: That certain people, especially managers, will oppose the revolutionary process, while others, especially those among the masses, will greet it enthusiastically.

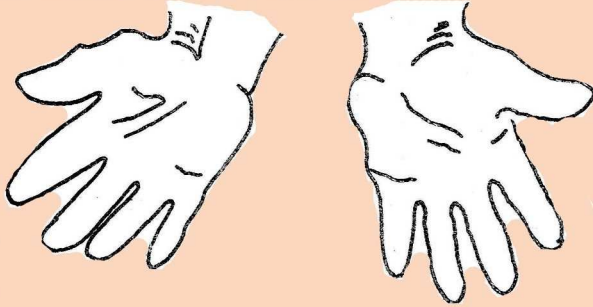


Third: That we should never hide the truth for fear of upsetting people or making them angry.



But now can you tell us, exactly and in detail, how this revolution works and so how we can bring it about.

That way we can control the whole process and start organising it now.



So you want an exact and detailed picture of the revolutionary process?

Very well, put it like this.

There was this farmer fellow...



Mk. 4. 26-29

One day he went out and scattered seed on the ground. Then he forgot all about it and went on with his usual business...



Some time later, when he revisited the same spot, he discovered that the seed had sprouted and had begun to grow on its own, how he could not say.


The ground had produced the crop all by itself.



Satisfied?



It's not exactly what we had in mind. Surely if it's left as loose as that the revolution will never achieve very much?



Ah you're afraid that my revolution might not achieve very much! Well take this insignificant seed. You couldn't imagine much coming of it if I took it and buried it in the ground, could you?

Mk. 4.31, 32

Yet you and I know that the result would be a bush so strong and tall that birds would come and build their nests in it.

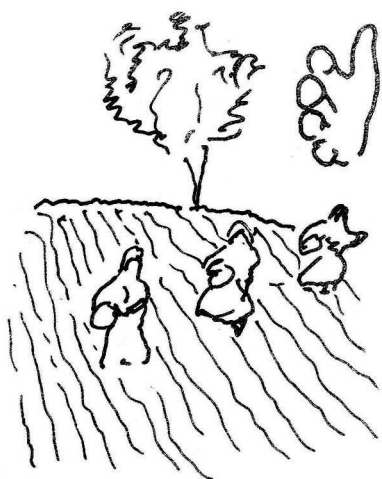
However, the anger and opposition, that Jesus' behaviour aroused amongst local people of importance, caused many of his initial supporters to waver.







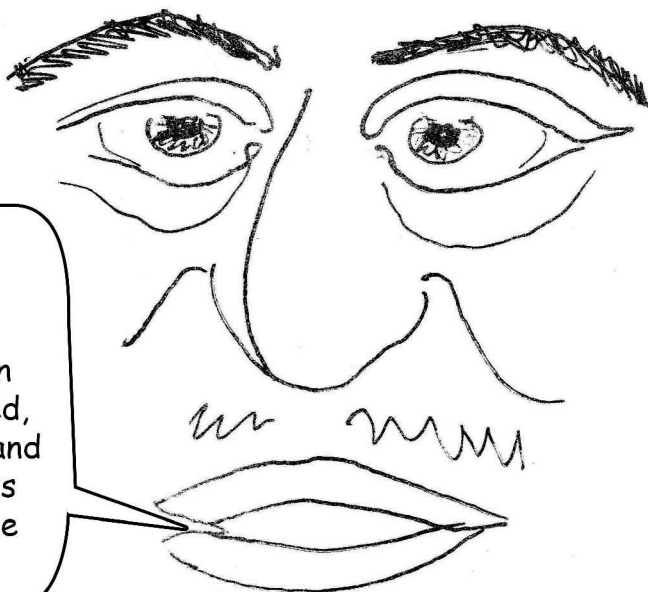
You used to work on a farm, didn't you? Well, suppose you're a farmer and last spring you sent your men out to sow a field.



However, now the crop has grown it appears that they must have sowed bad seed as the field contains nearly as much weed as wheat.

Mt 13.24-30

Your men come to you very red-faced. 'Sir', they say, 'we're certain we used good seed, we can't understand it! Do you want us to go and take the weeds out now?'



Ha ! That's a good one.
Weed a wheatfield !
Those men can't have
thought much about
what they'd be
taking on.


I'm glad you say that
for it's just what I was
thinking about you and
your problem.

What ! ...

Yes, well, I suppose
you're right. But one
day you'll be sorry
because I'm not
kidding when I say
such people are
dangerous.

Yes. Quite possibly !

In fact, I now know that wheatfields were
weeded in first century Palestine. However,
all those years ago I was not aware of this.




Peter, you look worried.
What are you thinking?

I don't know but it seems
to me Simon's got a point.
There has to come a time
when people get sorted.
Treachery can't always go
unchecked.


Peter, what would you
think of a fisherman
who pulled his nets in-
board and started
sorting out his catch
there and then at sea?

I'd say he didn't
know his job !
Sorting the catch
at sea's asking for
trouble. Plenty of
time to do that
back on dry land.

Mt 13. 47-50



Just what I thought. So in the same way there'll be plenty of time to sort out people when my revolutionary society is up and running.



Jesus, this is Mr Josephus, young Mark's employer. He wants a word with you.

Ah, Mr Josephus. Come in. Sit down. Tell me what I can do for you.

Yes, it's about Mark. You yourself know what a bright young lad he is and what a great future he has, if only he sticks at it. He's been getting along fine working for me - that is, till he heard you speak.

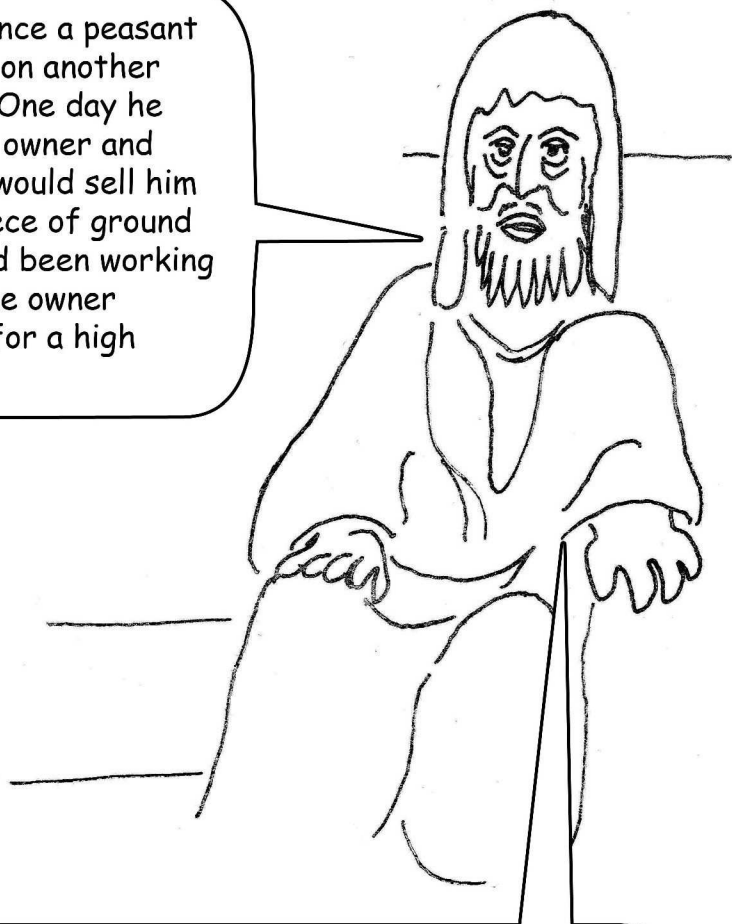


Since that moment he hardly takes time off to sleep or eat - let alone to come in to work. I've hardly seen him for days and when I do I can get nothing better out of him than some crazy idea about you. Now I know you're a sensible man with a real interest in that boy. A word from you and he will settle down.

Are you sure that you're not doing Mark an injustice? Let me give you a parable.



There was once a peasant who worked on another man's farm. One day he came to the owner and asked if he would sell him the little piece of ground which he had been working that day. The owner agreed but for a high price.

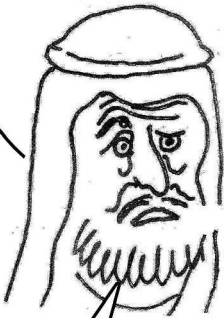
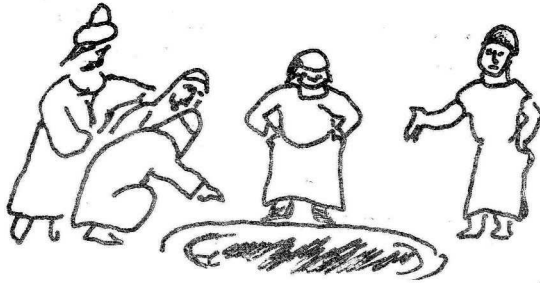


When the peasant's wife heard the news she was hopping mad. 'Are you off your head' she shouted. 'The land's no use to us and it will cost us everything we own.' But nothing she could say influenced her husband one bit.

Mt 13.44

The peasant went out, sold everything he and his wife possessed, and bought his field. But his wife sent for his family to try and get him put away.

However when everyone had come together the peasant took them to his new field and showed them a whole lot of treasure buried in the ground.



So you think what you have to offer Mark is fabulous treasure compared with my simple offer of employment.

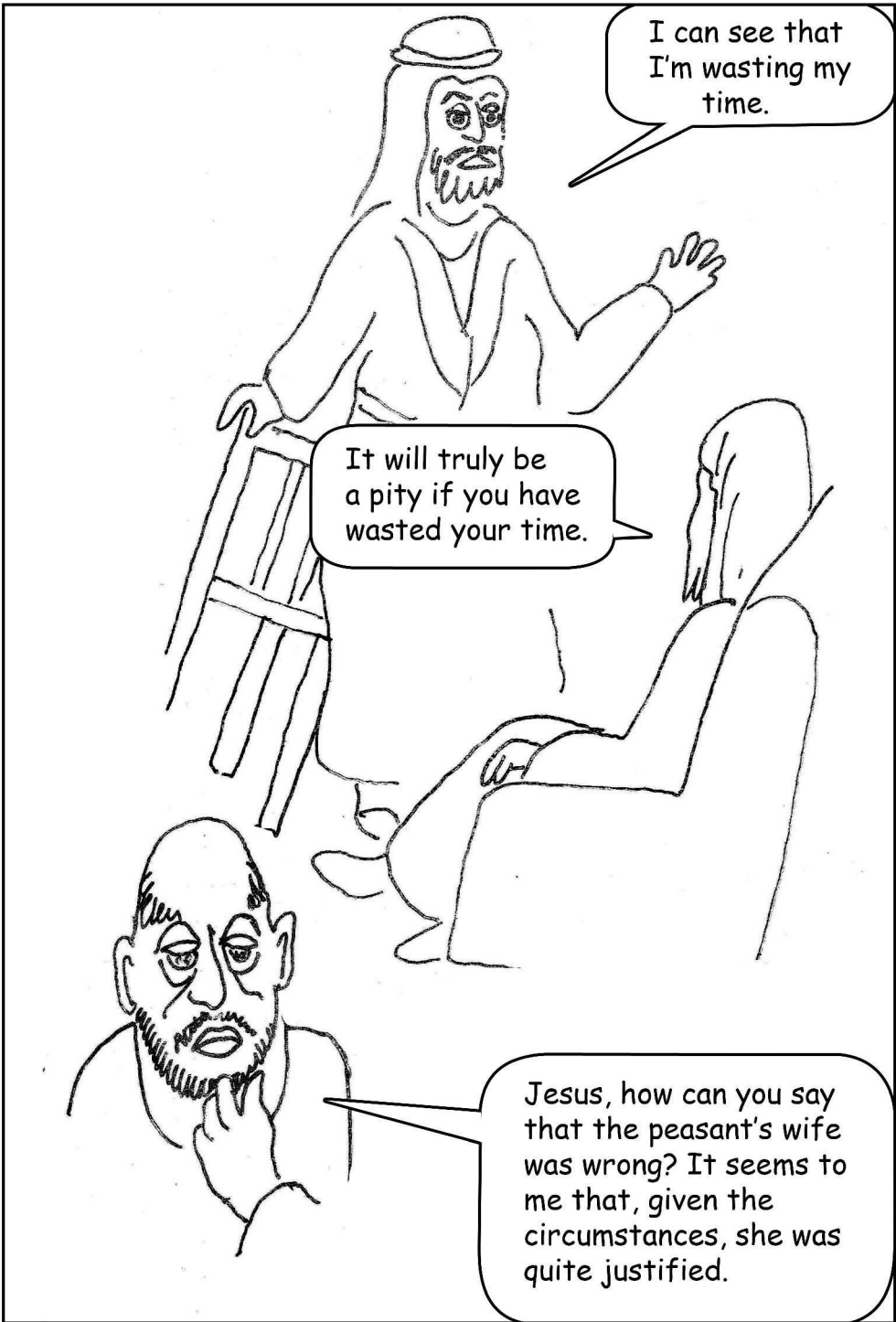
Not necessarily. All my parable shows is that you can only judge a person's actions from where they stand.



So we are to
allow young
people to be
carried away
by their
slightest
whim !



Can't think why. No one said
my peasant was right to do
what he did. However, if you
are being sensible you **MUST**
judge his actions taking into
account the treasure he had
discovered. And you
MUST NOT write him off
as mad - like his wife did - or
like you seem to write off
Mark.



I can see that
I'm wasting my
time.

It will truly be
a pity if you have
wasted your time.

Jesus, how can you say
that the peasant's wife
was wrong? It seems to
me that, given the
circumstances, she was
quite justified.



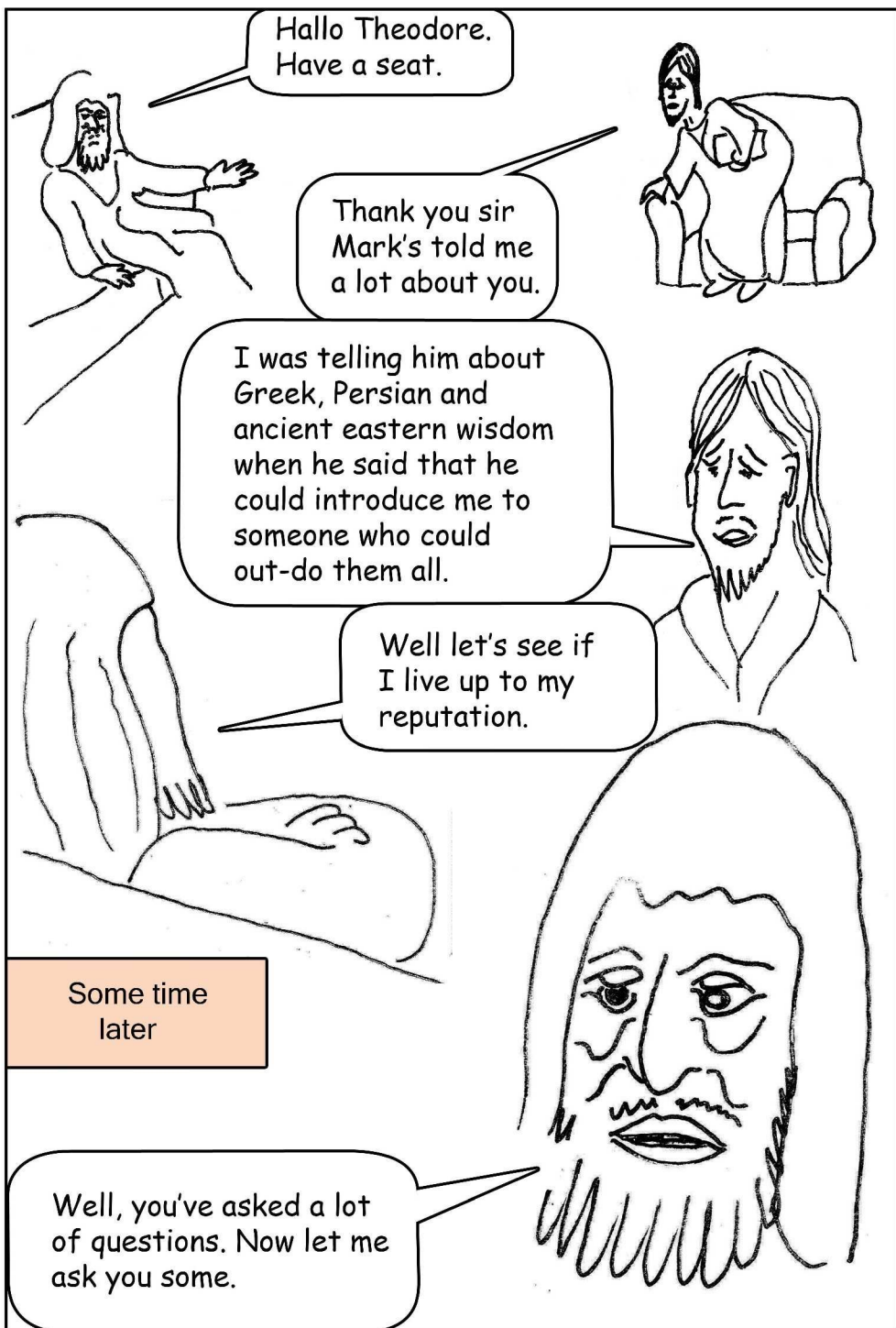
The trouble with you, Andrew, is that, like the Pharisees, you're an old moralist.

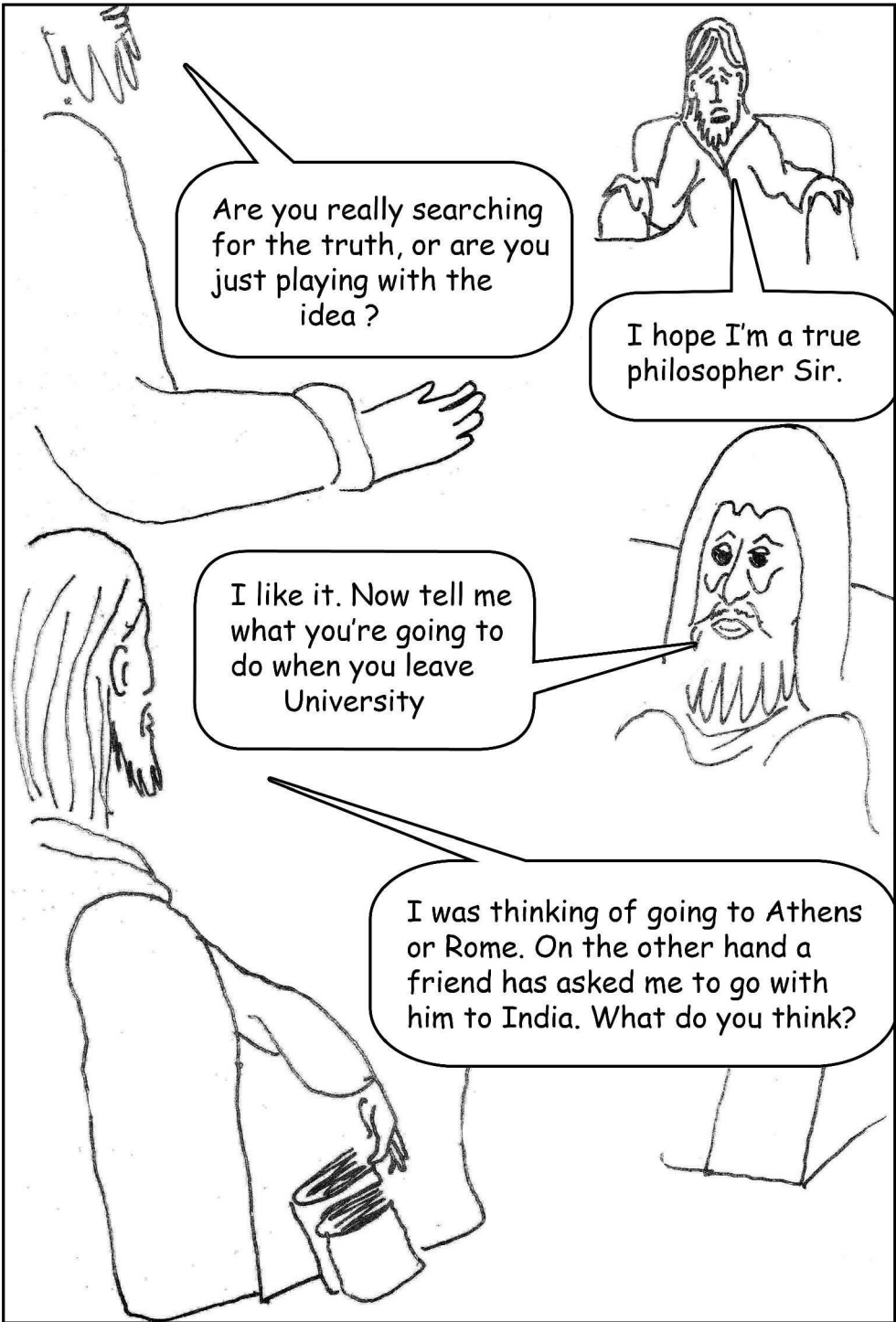


Life's not about doing what is morally right and then washing your hands of the consequences

If the woman had had her way her husband would have been in a mental hospital and she and her family bankrupt. **And a fat lot of comfort for them to know then that she had been morally right !**





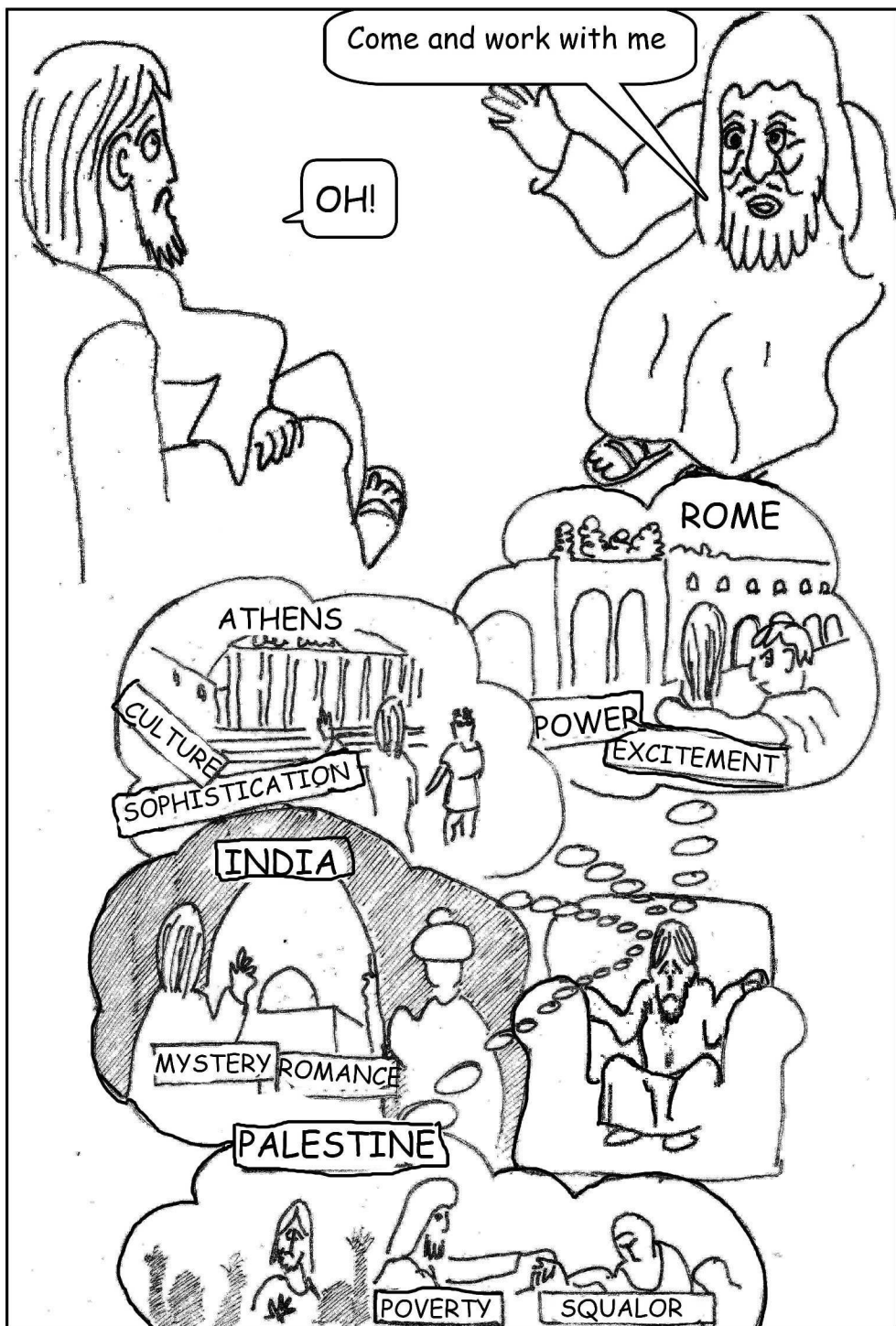


Are you really searching for the truth, or are you just playing with the idea ?

I hope I'm a true philosopher Sir.

I like it. Now tell me what you're going to do when you leave University

I was thinking of going to Athens or Rome. On the other hand a friend has asked me to go with him to India. What do you think?



Well ... EH! ... I ... EH! ...

I don't know !



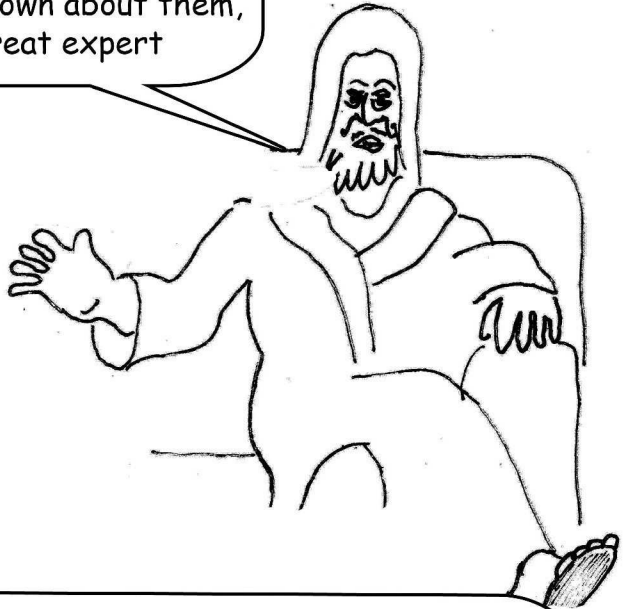
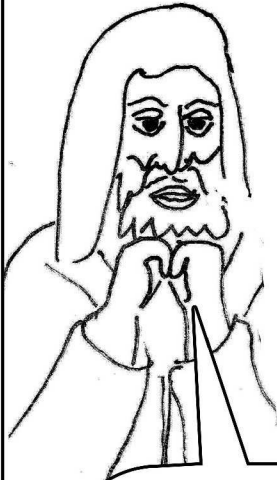
You know, someone who was really searching for the truth would not hesitate, given such a chance !

How do you mean ?



You don't see? Well then I'll give you a parable.

There was this merchant who had a passion for pearls. He knew all there was to be known about them, having become a great expert



He had built up a fine collection himself, even though he had not always been rich. Indeed he had become so respected in the trade that people called him Pearl King.

GREAT SALE OF PEARLS



One day some pearls came on the market. The star attraction was a really fantastic specimen. Not only was it unusually large but in warmth of colour and wonderful shape there was nothing like it.

Mt 13. 45, 46

When he saw the pearl the merchant immediately recognised its value and saw it as the chance of a lifetime

Here comes
Pearl King

Make way
for the King

What do you
think of it,
King?

Yes, its very beautiful.
How much do you
want for it?

For you, Pearl King,
a mere £400,000.

Ho Ho Ho !

Don't be ridiculous.
Even I'm not worth
that much.

Well, Pearl King, We
know you don't like
haggling. Name your
own price.

As you wish. My collection is valued at a quarter of a million. If I can find a buyer I'll offer you that.

PHEW !

The King sell his whole collection for one pearl !!

DONE !

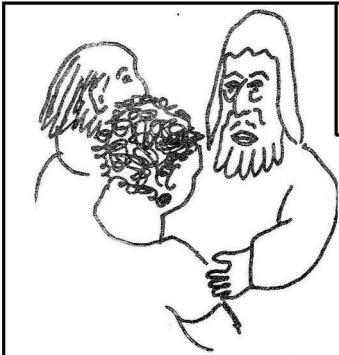
GASP !

That afternoon the deal was completed.

Don't you think Pearl King lived up to his name that day?

Yes Indeed !

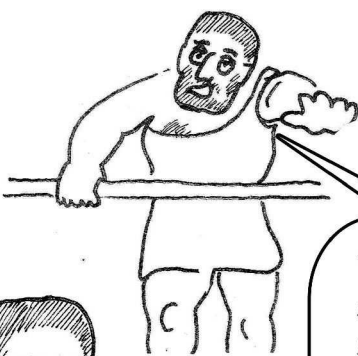
Well, goodbye Theodore. I hope some day you will become a true philosopher.



Two men have come to see Jesus.
They are followers of his cousin John.



Maybe you are not yet acquainted with this cousin, So let me introduce you

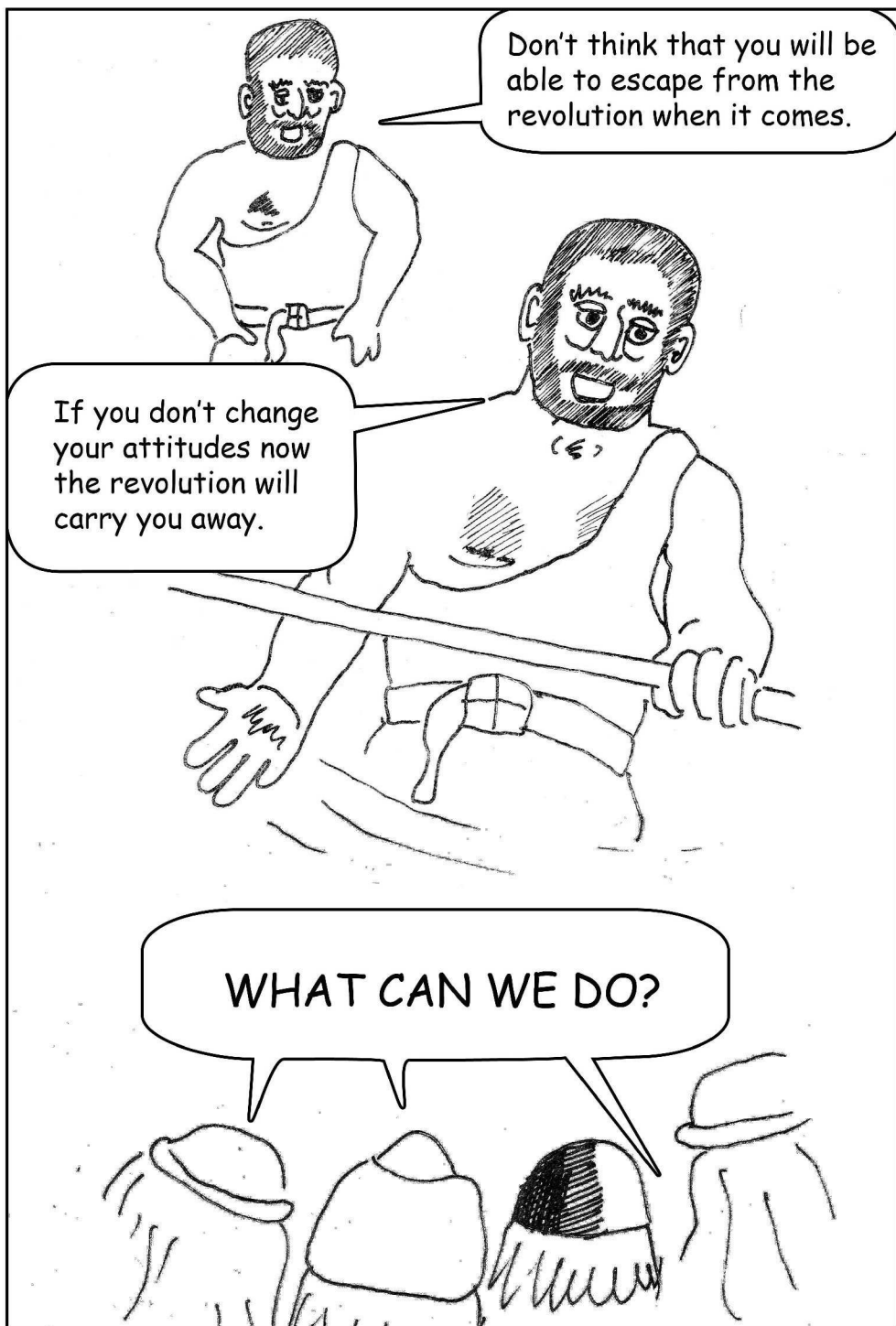


This society is an open sore, putrefying and stinking! Long ago a cancer invaded its head and now corrupts the whole body.



All of you are responsible.
Every father's daughter.
Every mother's son.

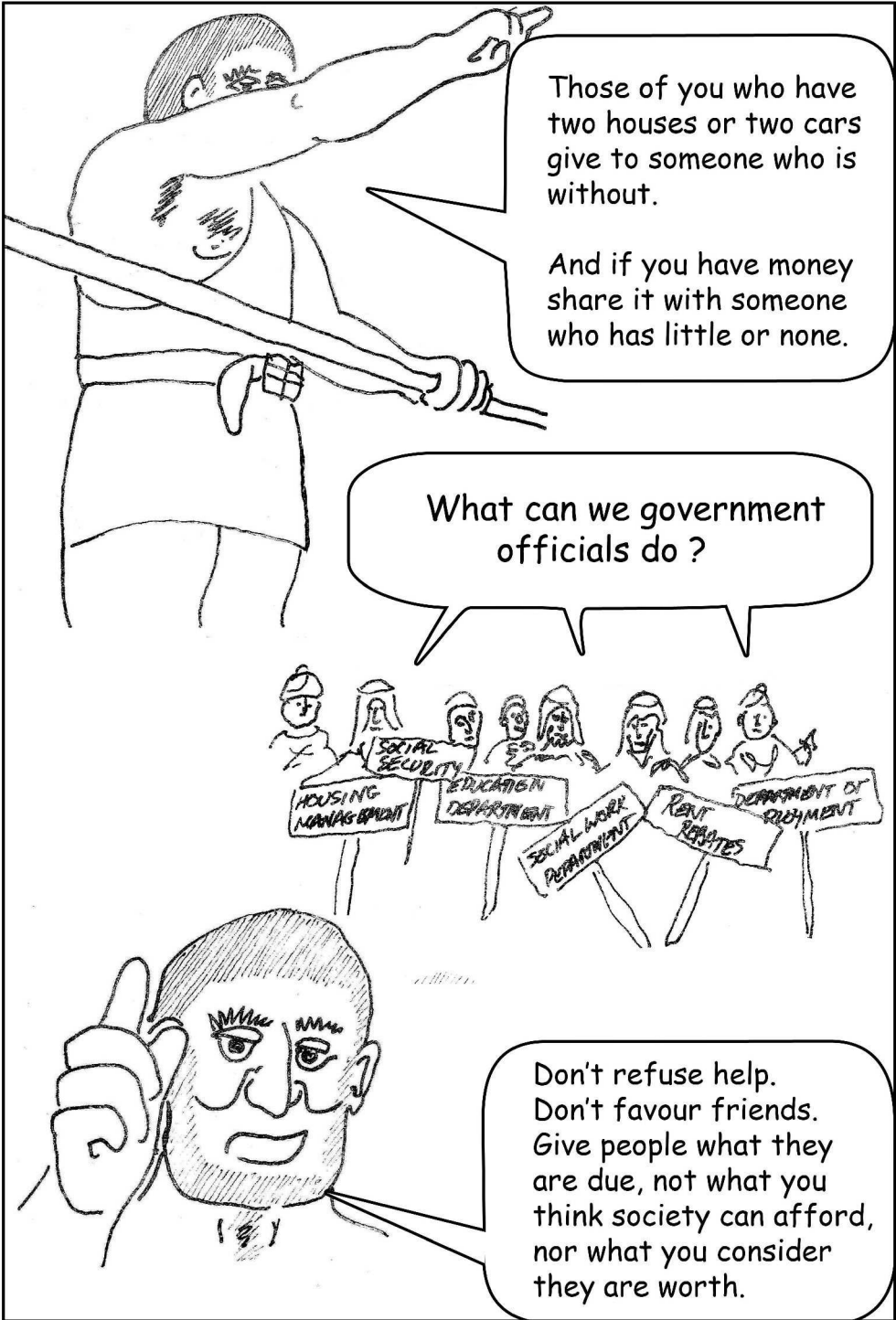
Lk 3.1-17



Don't think that you will be able to escape from the revolution when it comes.

If you don't change your attitudes now the revolution will carry you away.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

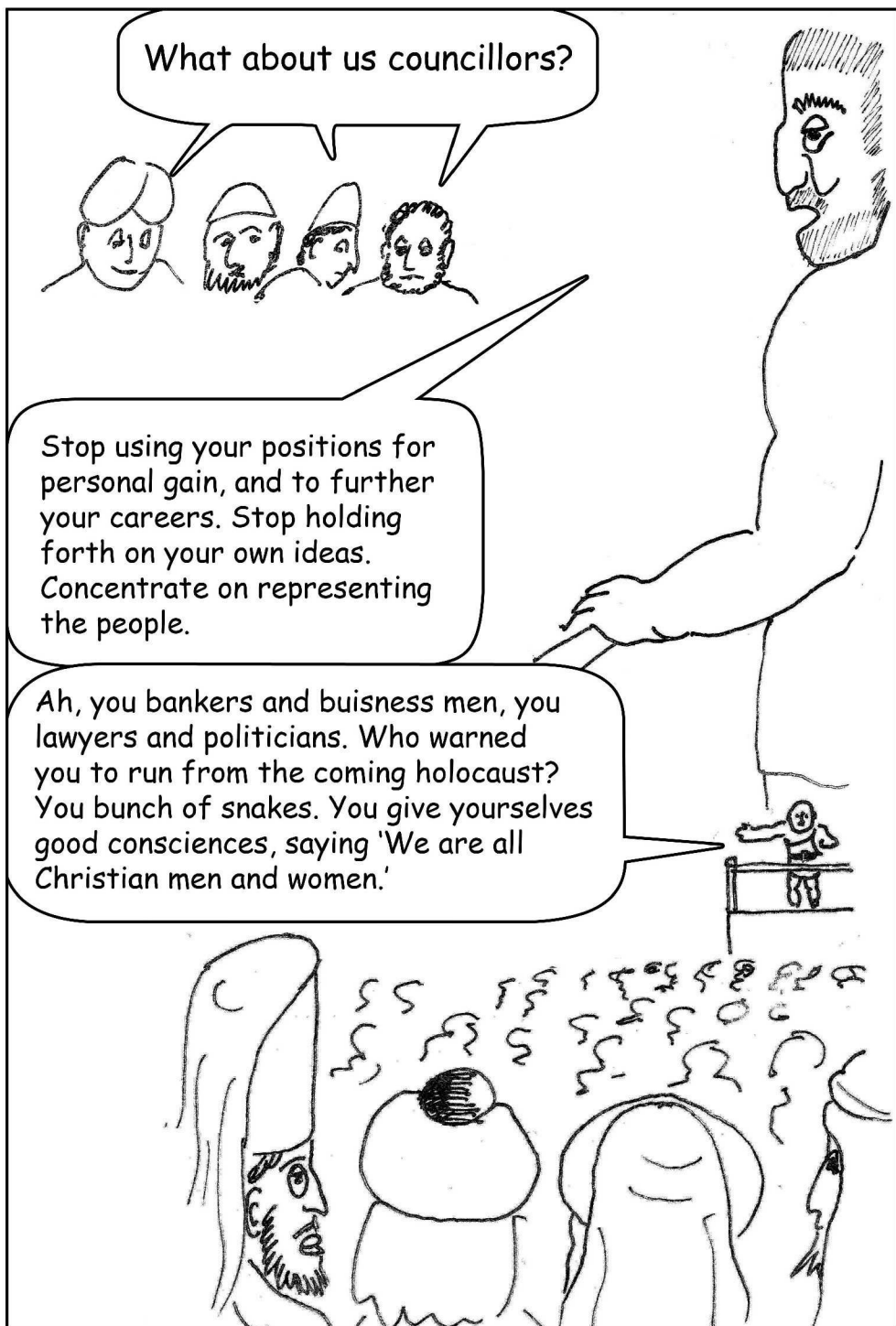


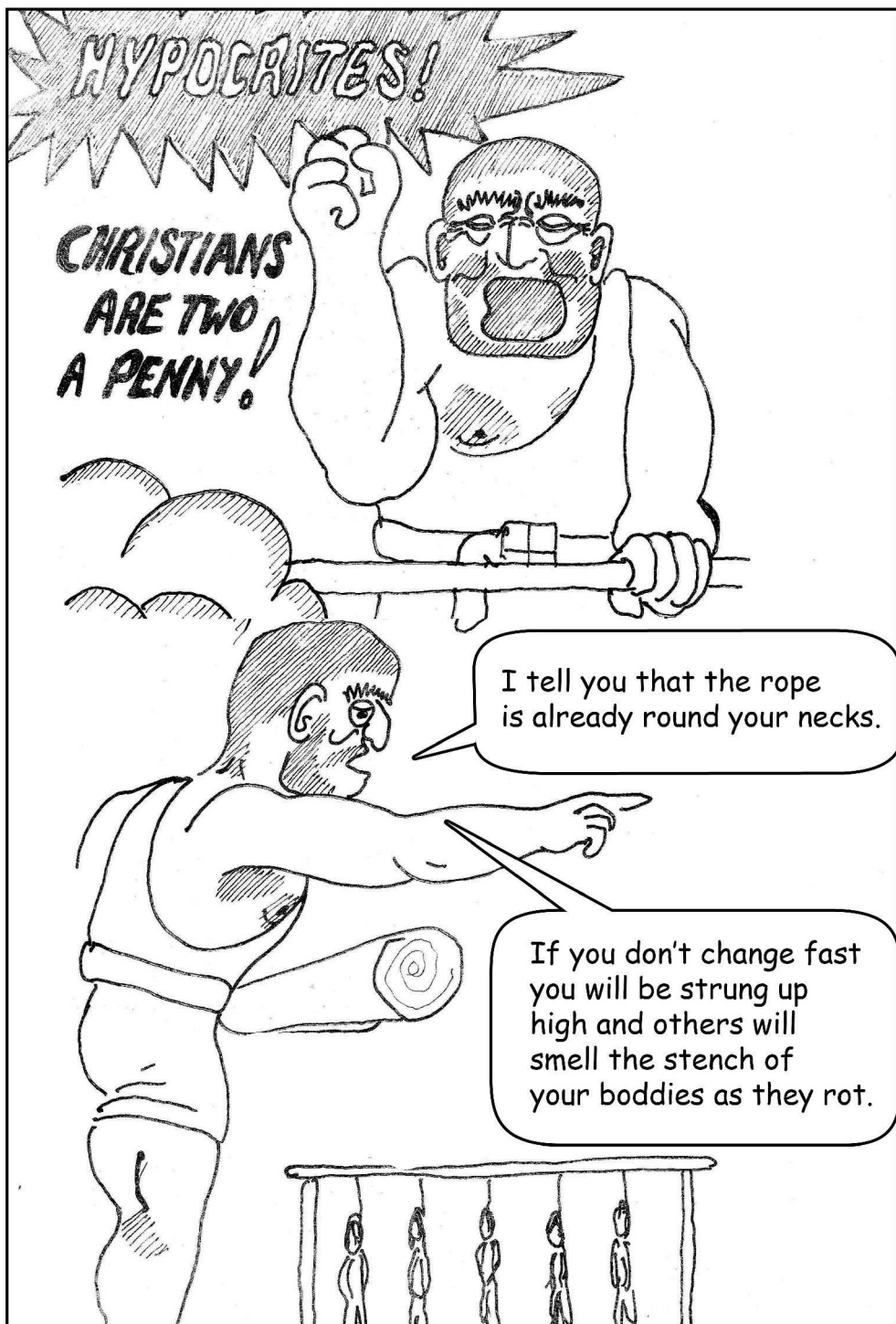
Those of you who have two houses or two cars give to someone who is without.

And if you have money share it with someone who has little or none.

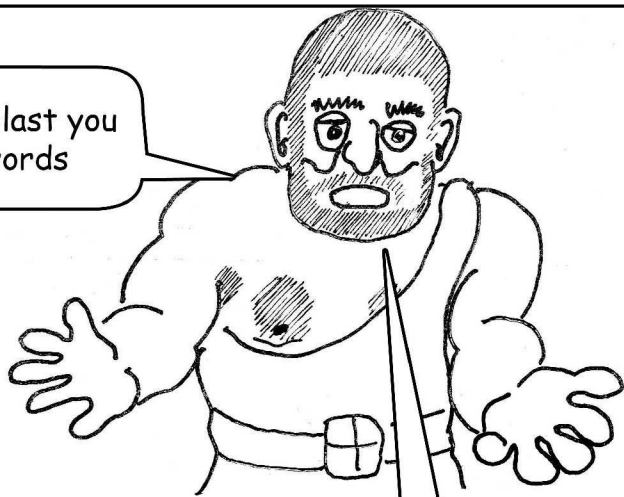
What can we government officials do ?

Don't refuse help.
Don't favour friends.
Give people what they are due, not what you think society can afford, nor what you consider they are worth.





I only blast you
with words

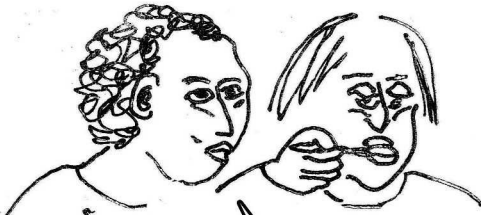


But there is another coming who will unleash
on you the full violence of the revolution.

He stands there, gun in hand.
The revolutionary fruit will
be safely gathered in but
the reactionary dregs will
be thrown out and burned.



So much for introductions. Now on with the story.



How's John then?

Pretty low. Though he doesn't say so. He's expecting every day to be his last.



Lk 3. 18-20



Sorry I forgot to tell you. John had publicly denounced Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee, for marrying his brother's wife, and Herod had retaliated by flinging John into prison. It would have been simpler to have him executed, but John was respected by the people, and Herod was a coward.



John sent you
a message

Tell me all about it.

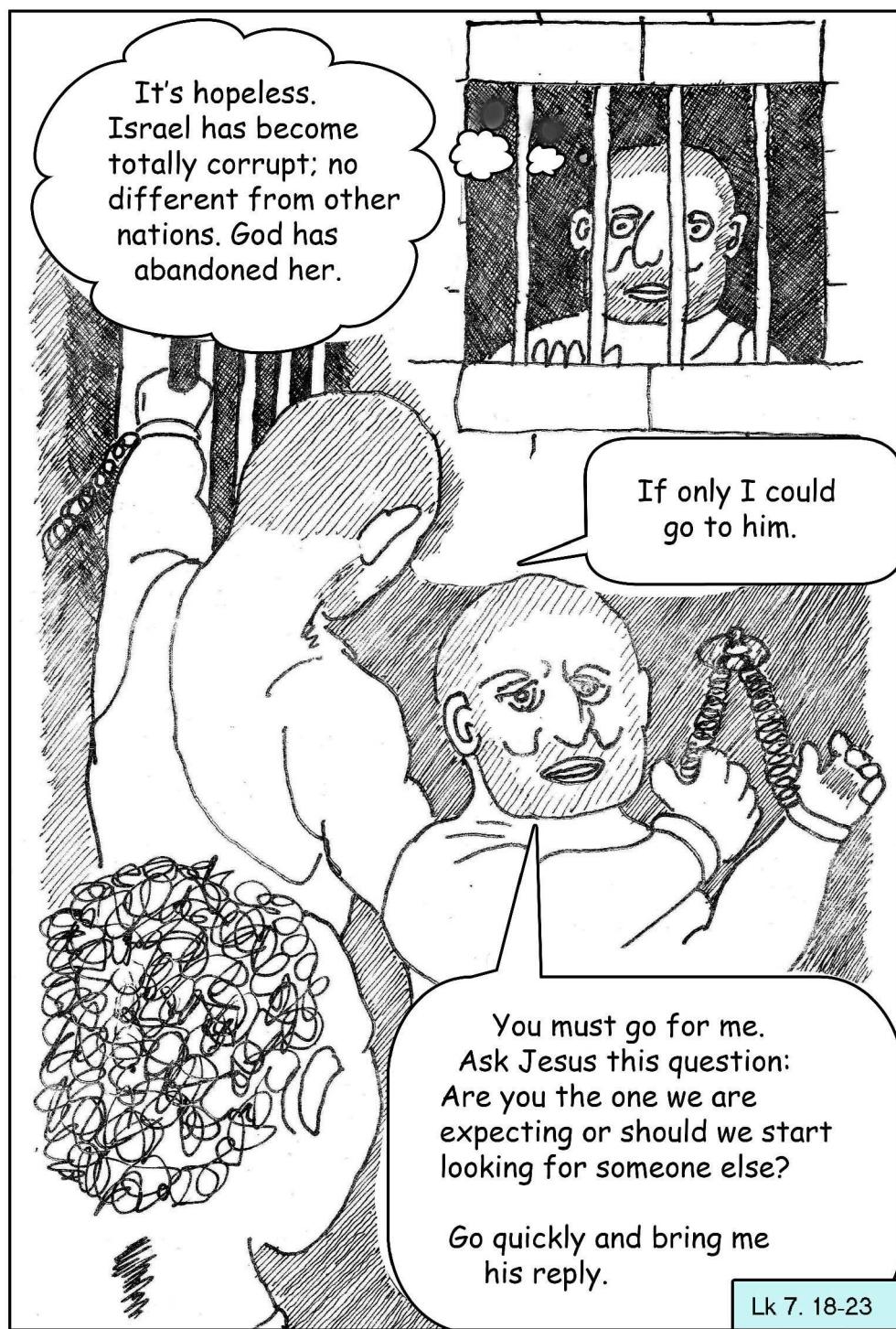


We visit him in prison
regularly. The first
thing he always asks
is about you and
whether there's any
sign of something
starting up.

At first he was patient
when we told him there
was no news. But
recently he has been
much less so.

Last time we saw him
he was beside himself
with anxiety.





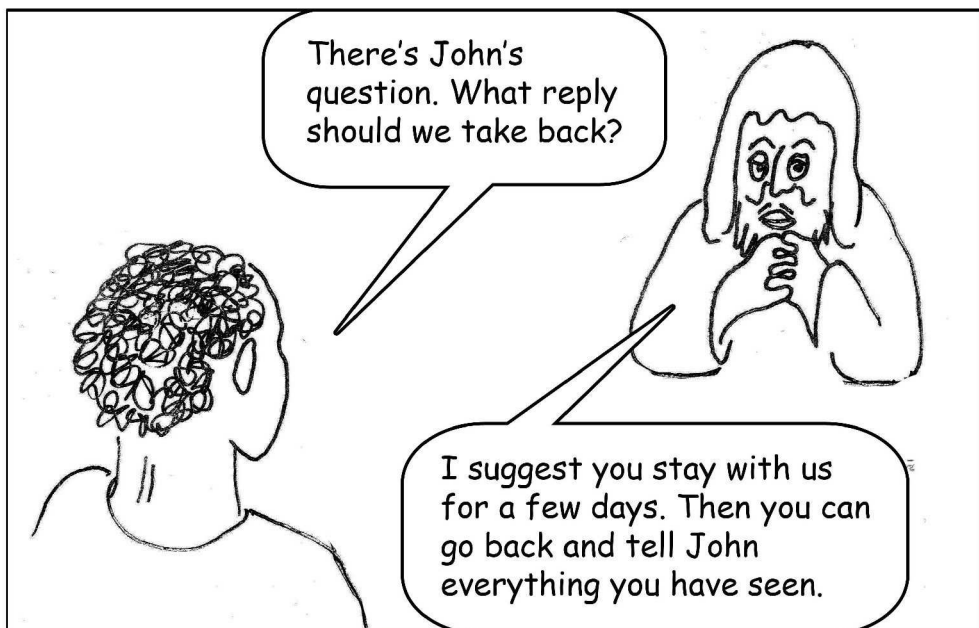
It's hopeless.
Israel has become
totally corrupt; no
different from other
nations. God has
abandoned her.

If only I could
go to him.

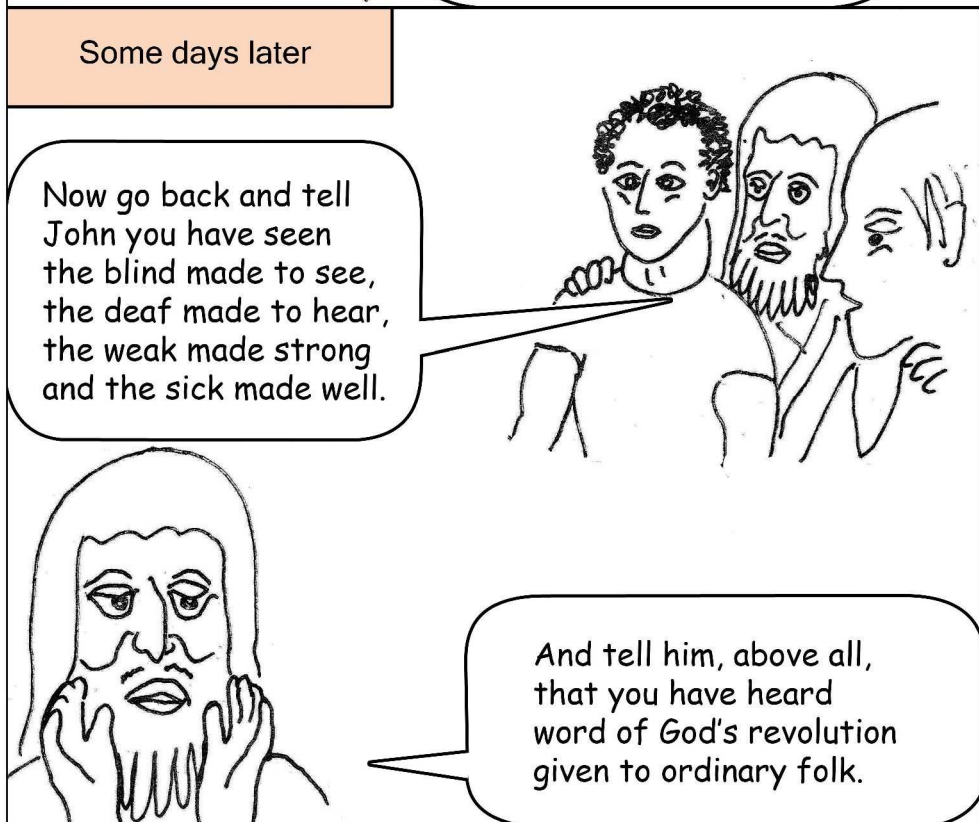
You must go for me.
Ask Jesus this question:
Are you the one we are
expecting or should we start
looking for someone else?

Go quickly and bring me
his reply.

Lk 7. 18-23



Some days later



Happy are those
who do not find me
a disappointment.

Tell me, what was it
in John that first
attracted you?



Was it the man's
power and wealth or
his social position?

NO!

No? You can easily get
all that on T.V. these days,
can't you ! Well what was
it then?

Lk 7. 24-28

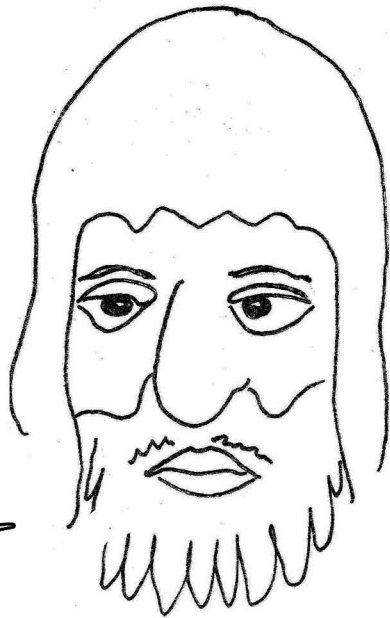
Well, from what we heard
it seemed that one of the
old-time revolutionaries
had suddenly popped up
again. It was tremendously
exciting.



One of the old-
time revolutionaries
Huh ?



Well, of course,
you're quite right.
For from Elijah
to Jeremiah there
never was anyone
greater than John.



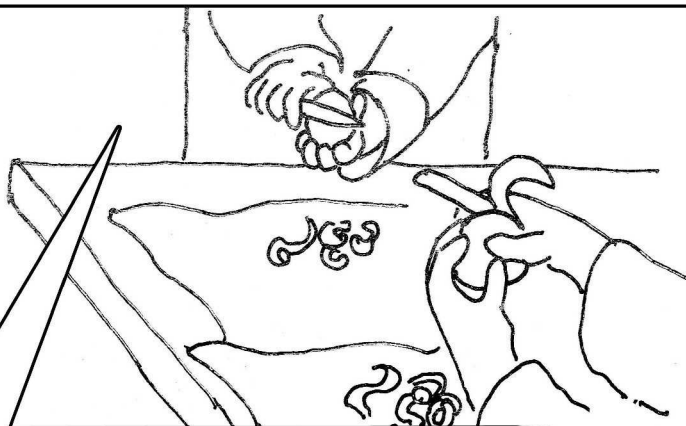


But John is the END,
the last of the old
tradition. He points
the way forward to
something far
greater:

THE NEW REVOLUTION

And anyone
who joins me
in my
revolution
will already
be miles
ahead of
John.





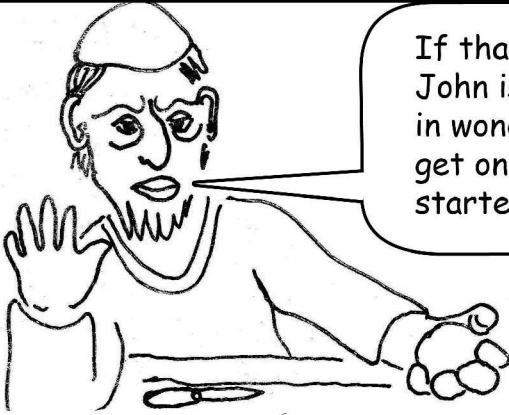
Jesus, I don't understand your criticism of John. After all, many people would say that, in the short time he was preaching, he made a bigger impression on a wider selection of people than even you did.

We're not in this business to make an impression.

But let's think about it. What did John and his lot do? They called on people - especially the powerful - to admit their oppressive attitudes towards people and to change.

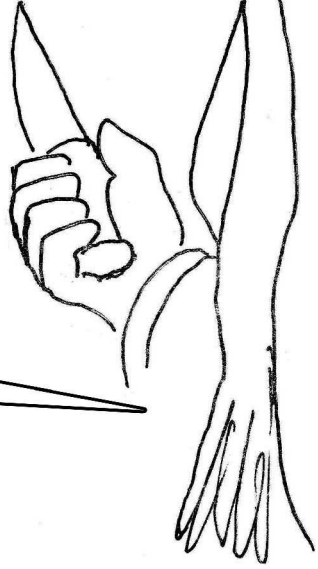






If that's the case then John is perfectly right in wondering why we don't get on with it. Nothing's started yet !

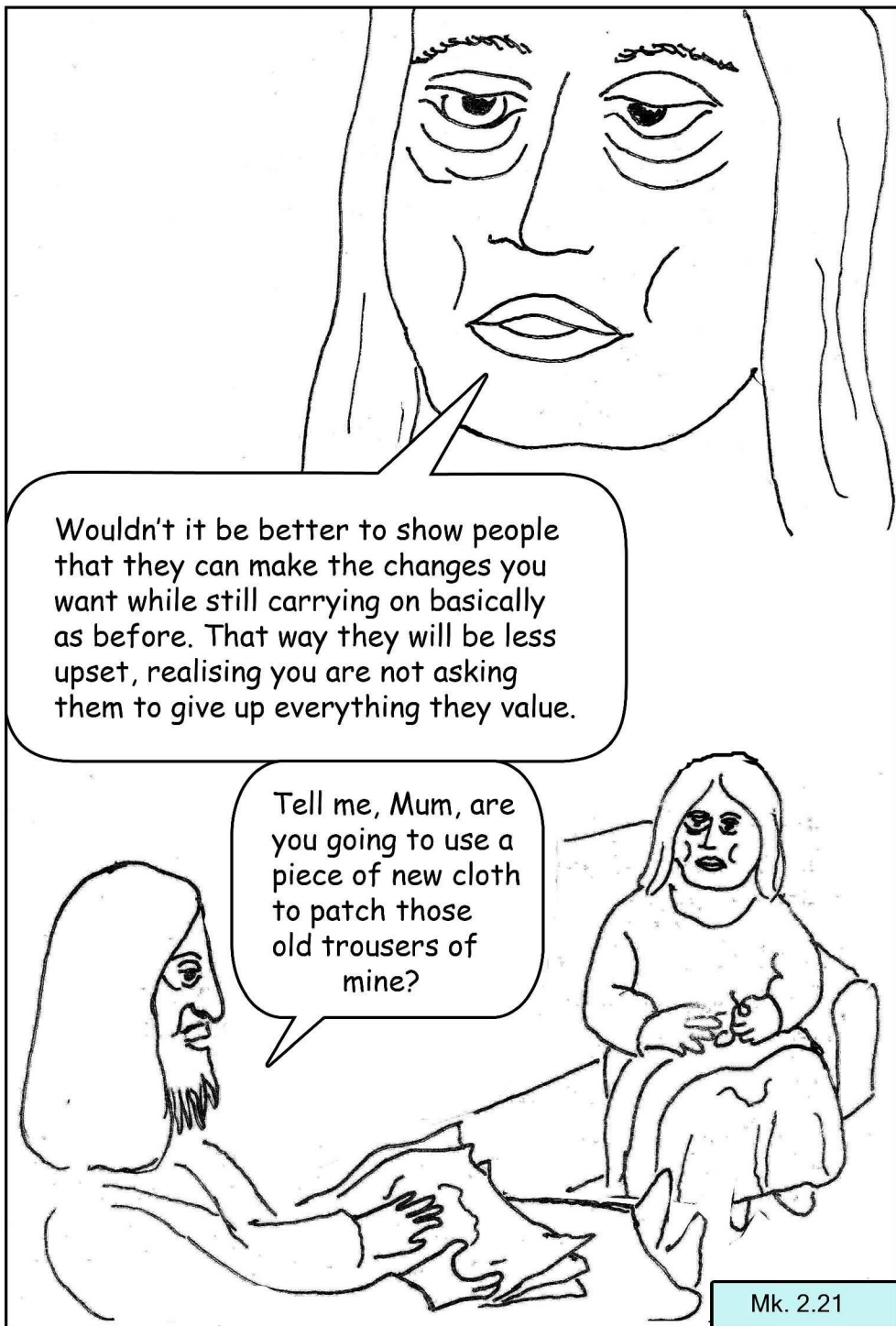
You say nothing's started but what you mean is that you and John would be greatly encouraged if you could SEE something happening. In fact you're both so blinded by your idea of what ought to be happening that it prevents you from seeing what is actually happening.



Good Heavens !
What on earth is revolution if you can't see it happening?







Mk. 2.21

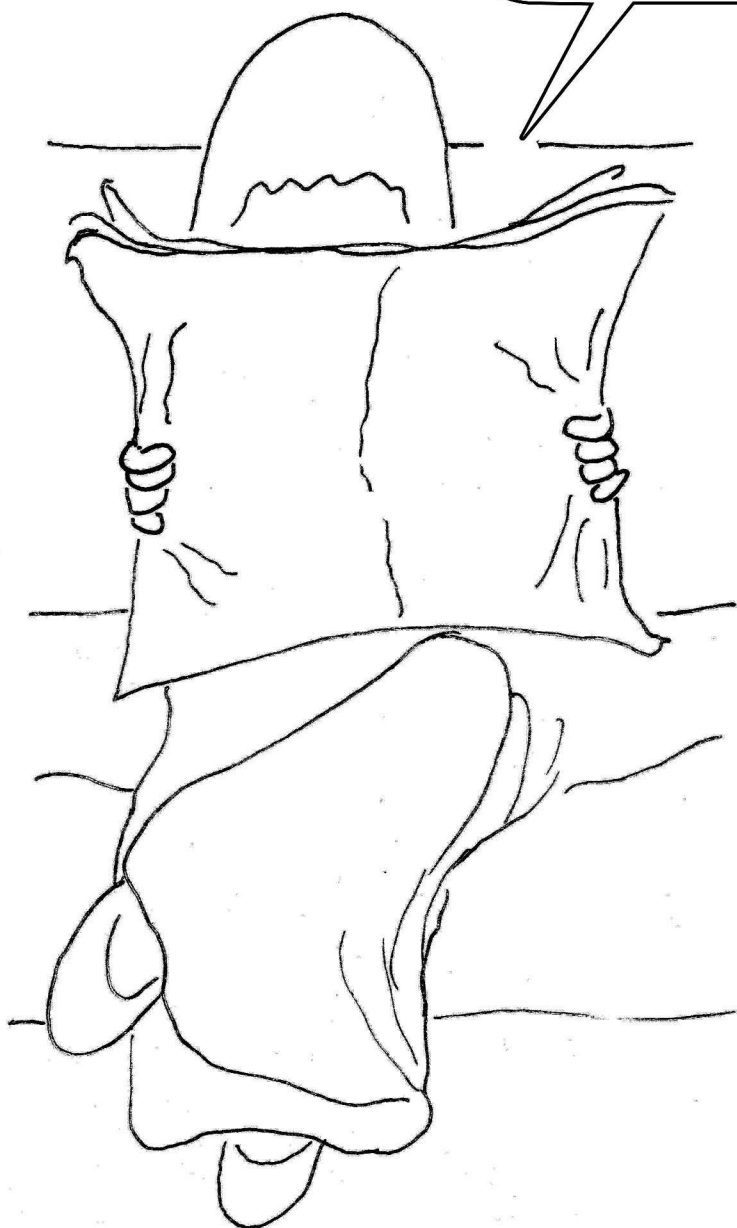


Of course not, dear.
You know as well
as I do that that
would never do.

If you did the patch
would shrink, wouldn't
it, and start pulling on
the surrounding cloth,
eventually tearing away
and making the hole
worse?

That's right, dear.

Silly thing to do !



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