

# *Roots in Ripon*

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*Chuck Roots*

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## Being Wrong

Every so often Isaura and I will see an advertisement for a movie that looks promising. Such was the case recently when a movie was released claiming to give the story of Jesus' death and resurrection from a secular perspective – that being the story of a Roman who has his own strange encounter with the one that was known as "The Nazarene."

Admittedly, I had reservations about this movie, even though it came highly recommended because the producers had also made "Heaven is for Real," and "War Room," both exceptionally well done movies about the Christian faith. But in seeing the previews for this new movie, "Risen," I was skeptical. I can't tell you why, other than it must have been something in the previews that didn't click with me.

On Saturday we had lunch with friends in Tracy. On our way home Isaura saw a billboard advertising "Risen." She turned to me and said, "We are free this afternoon. Let's go see 'Risen'!" How could I pass up a movie with my wife? So we headed for the AMC Theater in Manteca for the matinee showing of "Risen."

The movie began with a man wandering in the wilderness. Flashbacks kept occurring to him which eventually became the entire movie. The man was formerly a Roman tribune. A tribune was one of six Roman officers in a legion, rotating with the other five tribunes in commanding the legion during the year. A legion was a military unit ranging from 3,000 to 6,000 men. Battle scenes with their horrific violence and gore filled the screen, leaving Isaura covering her eyes until the scene was over. I, on the other hand, was watching with a scrutinizing eye to see if the portrayal of the battles, tactics, and uniforms were close to accurate. I'm pleased to report that the producers did a good job.

Actor Joseph Fiennes played Clavius, the fictional Roman tribune. His initial encounter with Jesus was when he was reporting to Pontius Pilate following his most recent battle that day with rebellious Jews. Though dirty and bloodied, Clavius is ordered by Pilate to see to it that Jesus is indeed dead on the cross. He has no interest in performing this duty, yet he is a faithful soldier and will obey his orders. He finds Jesus and the two thieves hanging on their crosses. He has them properly dispatched according to the manner of such barbarity. He encounters the grief of the followers of Jesus, most notably Jesus' mother, Mary. Just prior to Jesus being unceremoniously dumped into the paupers' grave, Josephus and Nicodemus arrive to secure his body. The movie progresses with Clavius ordered to secure the very dead Jesus in Josephus' tomb all the while causing him to constantly encounter the disciples and other Jesus followers. A interest in this crucified man begins to take hold in Clavius' heart.

The movie follows the spiritual journey of this Roman warrior, Clavius, a believer in the Roman god, Mars, the god of war and agriculture. He wrestles with

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his own understanding of praying to Mars, juxtaposed to this idea of a risen Jewish savior. Finally, he leaves his position as a Roman tribune and decides to follow the disciples who are leaving Jerusalem to take the Gospel message to "Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

A scene toward the end shows Clavius sitting with the risen Jesus on a large rock overlooking the Sea of Galilee. Jesus asks the Roman a poignant question: "What frightens you?" Hesitatingly, Clavius replies, "Being Wrong."

I was struck by the honesty in this answer. Were all of Clavius' beliefs, prayers and devotion to the Roman god Mars, wrong? No one, after all, wants to believe in something that is wrong. What's the benefit in that? The hard part is admitting that you've been wrong – embarrassed in admitting to having followed a false teaching or wrong faith.

The challenge for many who have embraced another belief, another faith, a different god, is giving up what they have believed to be true, and then embracing something new in Jesus, acknowledging that he is the one risen from the dead, the Savior of the world.

Over the years I have had many conversations with folks who hold back from accepting Jesus as their Savior and God simply because they cannot bring themselves to believe they were wrong "all these years"! It is in this vein that I believe Clavius is struggling in accepting that Jesus is truly risen from the dead, and therefore the true and living God. After all, it was placed on the fictional character Clavius' shoulders the responsibility of assuring Pilate that the Nazarene was dead, buried, and his body being secured from the possibility of being stolen away by the disciples.

But an encounter with Jesus, fully alive, was transforming for the Roman. And that's exactly what it was intended to be.

See the movie.

And, let me ask you – have you met this Jesus?