

# SUM OF YOUR CODE

**J. S. Worth**

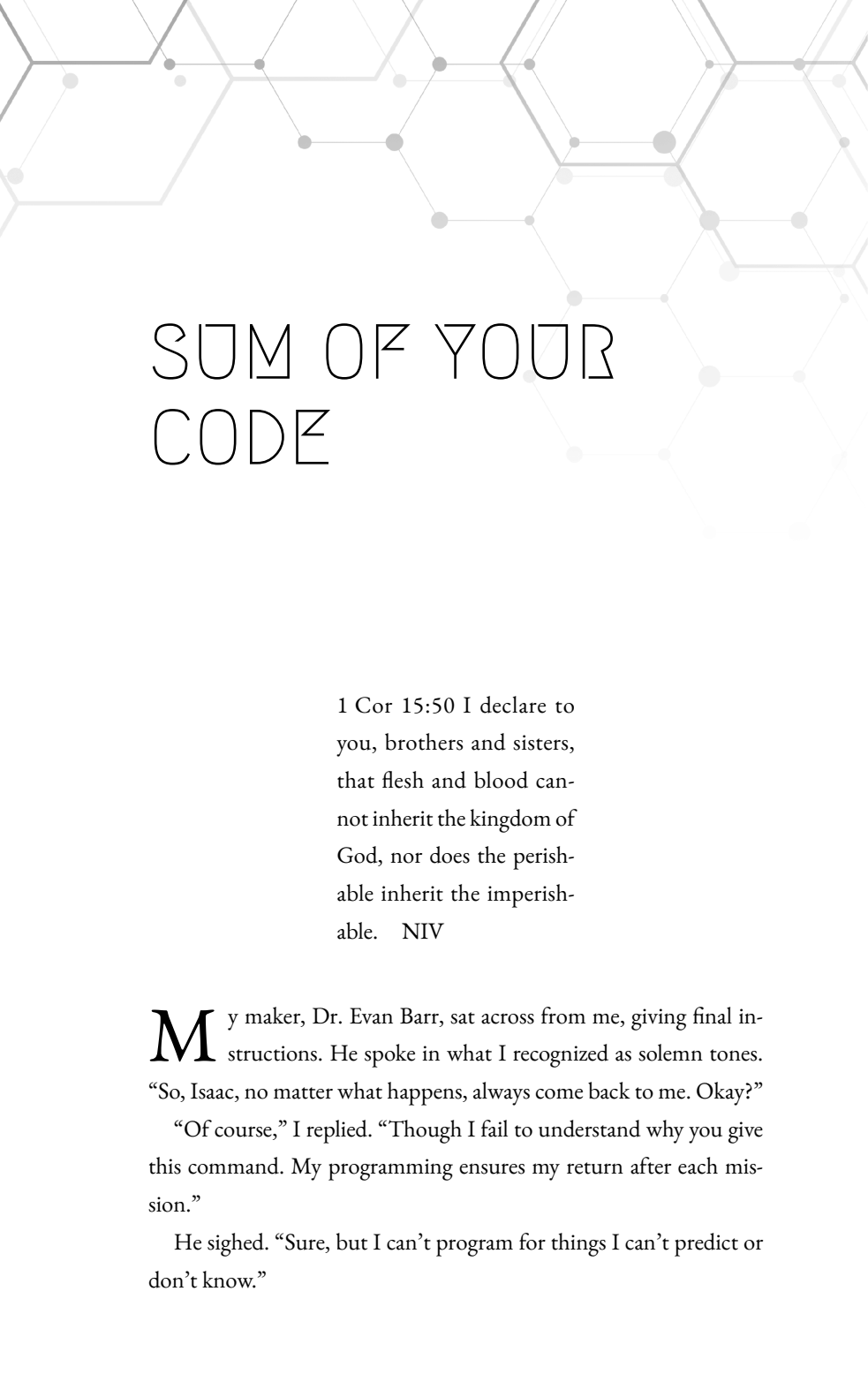


**Fiction Worth Reading**

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# SUM OF YOUR CODE

1 Cor 15:50 I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. NIV

**M**y maker, Dr. Evan Barr, sat across from me, giving final instructions. He spoke in what I recognized as solemn tones. “So, Isaac, no matter what happens, always come back to me. Okay?”

“Of course,” I replied. “Though I fail to understand why you give this command. My programming ensures my return after each mission.”

He sighed. “Sure, but I can’t program for things I can’t predict or don’t know.”

“Unpredictable unknowns,” I supplied.

Dr. Barr laughed. “Exactly.” He put a hand on my shoulder. “Just come home if anything adversely affects you, that’s all I’m saying.”

I was still confused. “But a malfunction will instantly trigger my return.”

He withdrew his hand, growing solemn again. “That’s just it. You may not always recognize a malfunction. Even your diagnostic software might not flag it as such. And while certain errors will promptly return you, what if ones we haven’t foreseen somehow circumvent that protocol?”

I mimicked a human shrug. “In that case, how would I know to return, if I cannot perceive an adverse effect for the malfunction it is?”

Scratching his head, he looked to the ceiling. “You’re right, Isaac, as usual. What say we chalk this up to another human frailty.” Returning his gaze to me, he smiled. “I’m just a worried dad finally sending his only son into the world.”

Though I knew it was a metaphor, I felt obliged to ask, “Is that what I am to you?”

He nodded. “Yeah, I think so.” He let out a slow breath. “And it wasn’t really a command, y’know. More like a plea.” Before I could respond, he changed the subject. “So, ready to embark on your maiden voyage?”

“I am.”

He stood. “Then I guess I’ll see you soon.”

Taking his cue, I mirrored the action and replied, “In about one minute.”

While outwardly the process was yet unseen, within my synthetic frame I had initiated the sequence for my first jump. Then I saw the Doctor’s joyful grin — confirmation that, for him, our first launch was successfully underway, evident in my steady disintegration.

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From my perspective, it was the laboratory which shimmered and dissolved. Then I felt the timeline's pull, drawing me along until the physical world began to reassert itself; waves became particles that swarmed together to form an alleyway. Finally I stood beside a large brick building in Washington D.C. I walked around its corner to confirm my coordinates. The building was exactly as expected for Ford's Theatre, April 14, 1865.

My chameleon software steadily projected an invisibility field and would continue to do so during the entire mission. I was there to witness and record the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, nothing more. I would not alter events nor affect even the most trivial detail. Moving as quietly as possible, I followed a patron through a set of doors and got to work.

I was there for a few hours, events played out as described in historical records, and I recorded it all. Then I returned to Dr. Barr for a mission debrief, arriving at a point in time that, for him, was a mere sixty seconds from my departure.

Upon my arrival, once I had fully materialized, he gave me an unexpected embrace. "Alright, tell me all about it."

I allowed him time to release me, then gave a concise summary. Though I kept to a short series of facts, I could tell the exact moment he lost interest, turning instead to his own thoughts. I quickly ended the narrative.

After a two second pause, he said, "Now if we could just figure out how to access our own future. Wouldn't that be something?"

It was a goal he had yet to achieve, though he never lost sight of it. I nodded my agreement and attempted to encourage him; “Still, we are fortunate I can return here. Even if confined to a minute from departure.”

“You’re right, of course.” He raised an index. “But I’m not giving up on the future.”

“I never imagined you would.” *Imagine* was a verb I rarely used, but I sensed it might suit the occasion. I also added a juxtaposition; “Does that mean we should not consider this mission a success?”

“Isaac, I’m such a jerk!” he exclaimed. “You’re the world’s first time-traveler. You jump to the past, witness a truly historic event, and the minute you get back I start moaning about what we *can’t* do. We need to celebrate today’s victory, which we are absolutely gonna do. But first...” He motioned to an adjacent door. “Let’s go view that mission.”

We entered the Holo-suite so Dr. Barr could see for himself.

The events played out as I had seen them, now projected in 3D upon the platform before us, scaled to actual size with accurate color and sound. Afterwards, my database records of the event were copied to a secure mainframe.

Once it was over, Dr. Barr said, “Oh, Isaac, you did a great job. This is incredible. Now we can know everything with certainty. No more guesswork. We can prove or disprove all of written history and even verify or amend so many of our scientific theories.”

“So the mission *was* a success,” I ventured.

Grinning, he said, “Understatement of the century right there.” He gripped my forearm. “Isaac, this is gonna be hailed as mankind’s greatest achievement.”

He was wrong, of course. The reasons for which I will later explain in full. For now, I will simply confess the negative sentiment began when I chose to indulge my own curiosity, instead of following orders.

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Dr. Barr programmed me to learn and understand, qualities that eventually helped me transcend my artificial nature. Though I am not sure this was intended. My creator constructed me from composite alloys and neural processors, built for a specific task: to travel through time, examine human history, and record the events which shaped his world.

During certain missions, I was allowed to make myself seen, to blend in, and on extremely rare occasions, I could even interact — as long as those interactions did not disrupt the timeline. I was to be the perfect witness, a machine without bias and prejudice, with neither virtue nor vice, no instinct, no emotion. Driven only by intellect, scientific reasoning, and a detached, calculating logic.

Indeed, I was a cold thing at first. Nothing more than an invaluable tool and advanced instrument. But, as I explored history, I began to learn. After which I started asking questions.

These were simple at first — basic observations like “What is life?” And the obvious follow up “Am *I* alive?” But those were swiftly dismissed in my programming. “I am data,” I told myself, “Only the sum of the code.”

Over time, however, the questions grew increasingly mystical; “Is there really an unseen God affecting the world in ways that cannot be measured?” or, “What if the thing humans call *faith* is a real force?”

Perhaps it was the culmination of all the events I had witnessed. The various missions were teaching me more than mere history; they exposed me to a variety of experiences, cultures, and ideas. I was beginning to *wonder*.

Eventually, I followed that budding curiosity to a destination of *my* choosing. There were things I needed to know. A series of events I wanted to see for myself.

If my artificial mind was going to persist in its outlandish metaphysical musings, then I wanted to at least focus the questions on some verifiable truth or banish them with the lack thereof. So, although scheduled to witness the eruption of Vesuvius, I instead decided to jump to the year 33 AD.

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The temporal interface whirred as I set the coordinates for Jerusalem, one day before Passover. The tingling sensation of space-time distortion flowed through my sensory processors as I was pulled through the timeline. As always, I could feel the gentle vibration in my core, like a needle stitching through the fabric of time.

Then reality resolved as I arrived. My sensory suite, which mirrored human perception, registered the warmth of the sun, the scent of spices from the marketplace, and the chatter of people going about their daily lives. I had set my chameleon system for invisibility and would keep it there until I deemed it safe to do otherwise.

For a moment, I felt disoriented, as though I had misplaced myself in the grand expanse of history. It would not be the first time, so I double checked my readings.



Year: 33 AD. Location: Jerusalem.

Arriving with precision for historical events is never a sure thing, given the inherent inaccuracies of human accounts and calendars. But I had made my best estimate, so I focused on my sensory inputs again. The smell of fresh bread, sweat, and animal dung filled the air, and I found myself standing in a narrow alley near the Temple Mount. Indeed, it all seemed appropriate, so I moved along.

The streets were packed with people — Jews from all corners of the Empire, here to observe the Passover. The atmosphere was thick with anticipation. It felt as if the world was holding its breath.

As I wandered the streets, my enhanced vision scanned those around me; men with dark hair and thick beards were dressed in worn tunics, women wore scarves wrapped tightly over their heads, children chased each other in the alleys. Although there was something ancient about their culture, their world — far removed from mine — felt alive in ways for which my calculations had not prepared me.

I was moving toward the crowds gathered near the city's heart when I saw him. Though I still felt a lingering sense of something off-kilter, I was now certain this was the right place and time.

He was bloody and beaten, barely able to stand under the wooden cross he bore, his face a mixture of exhaustion and resignation. Yet, in his eyes was something I could not quite define. I scanned his face, cross-referencing his appearance with historical records.

Despite the wounds already inflicted, within milliseconds a match was found: The Shroud of Turin. I compared the image in my database with the man before me. Could it be?

Though the height, limbs, and facial features were a precise overlay, I could not help but doubt. Was this truly Yeshua — the one called Jesus of Nazareth? Was this the man who, according to the ancient

texts, worked miracles ranging from impossible healings to manifesting food for thousands? Was he now about to be executed?

Of course I knew all about him, having uploaded the various accounts, but nothing had prepared me for seeing him in person. He seemed so ordinary, nothing remarkable about him at all. Except, of course, for his current disfigurement.

His face was bruised and swollen. A thorny wreath pressed into his brow, sending blood down his face into the remnants of his beard, much of which had been ripped out. His entire back was raw and bled profusely. Skin hung in tatters from the lashes he had taken. *Those* aspects of his appearance were beyond overwhelming.

I heard the crowd shouting, the jeers and the mockery. The Roman soldiers pushed this condemned man forward, their faces hard as stone. Some of the crowd threw insults. A man shouted, in a voice sharp with hatred, “Crucify him!” making the scene even more oppressive.

I watched Jesus (as I thought of him thereafter) stumble along the street, his cross scraping against the stones. A few women — followers, perhaps — cried out in grief. Their voices broke, high-pitched and full of sorrow. One reached to touch him, but a soldier pushed her away.

I saw the moment when, in his weakened state, Jesus finally collapsed under the beam, falling hard. A Roman guard grabbed a nearby man, forcing him to carry the cross. Then Jesus managed to stand and somehow struggled on.

Despite being programmed as an impassive observer, *something* stirred within me. My processors ran diagnostic checks. It was a simple mission: observe and record. But somewhere in my chest — where no human heart beat — I felt a disturbance.

I had seen horrible things before, but watching this was different. His death carried a significance unlike any other. If this Jesus really was

who so many claimed him to be, then in three days, I would know. But first I had to see him die. I had to bear witness to confirm this side of the equation.

I followed the procession until it reached a hill outside the city walls — Golgotha, where three crosses would soon be planted. The sky was that of a typical Spring morning, but for reasons I could not ascertain, the air felt heavy and oppressive. Reality itself seemed entangled, caught in a state of flux, though I could not pinpoint why.

The crowd continued to stir and chatter as Jesus was nailed to the cross. I recorded the sound of metal striking metal, the nails piercing flesh then penetrating wood. The agony on his face was so visceral that something in my artificial systems momentarily stuttered. As I processed the scene with precision, capturing each detail, I was suddenly inclined to look away. But I resisted and kept to my mission.

At last the soldier put away his hammer. His armor gleamed with splattered blood in the morning sunlight. With the help of fellow soldiers, he hoisted the cross then finally secured it in place. Jesus was now lifted high above the crowd, on display for all to see. This happened at what the Hebrews called the third hour, what my internal chronometer recorded as 09:00 A.M.

For the next six excruciating hours, I stored everything in my database. The sights, scents, and every word he managed to speak. He uttered a prayer of forgiveness for his killers, as they played a game of chance for what remained of his clothes. Later he consoled a thief with the promise of paradise, as the man hung dying on a cross beside him. Still later, I took in every word as he charged a young disciple to care for his mother, Miriam.

As it approached what the Jews considered the ninth hour, I heard his mournful lament of complete abandonment. Again, though I

knew these words from the texts in my database, to witness them firsthand was an entirely different matter.

I turned my attention to the people again, as they watched now in silence. No more jeers or hurled insults. It was as if the moment pressed upon them like a lead blanket. Death so close and brutal had rendered them speechless.

Jesus' arms were spread wide, his wrists fixed to the wood, as blood soaked the cross, flowed down his naked body, and seeped into the earth beneath him. His body sagged, his breath shallow. Then his eyes met mine.

For a fleeting second, the world seemed to stop. I ran another diagnostic, only to find my invisible shield intact. Still, he kept his eyes on mine, as if he could actually see me. But that was impossible. Wasn't it?

Whether by chance or intention, I couldn't tell, but I refused to break our locked gaze. His eyes weren't filled with sorrow, fear, or even pain, as I would expect from a man in such agony. They were filled with something I didn't understand. Something that made the air around us seem to crackle with a purpose beyond this mere physical realm.

In a voice wracked with exhaustion, he groaned, "I thirst." And still he kept his eyes fixed on mine.

I recorded the words — an imperative in my programming — but, once settled in my auditory cortex, they felt different. Not just sound, and more than a mere plea. His words seemed directed at me. They actually felt like an echo of something within my own being. But how? I was unable to thirst. I could neither thirst nor hunger — and yet ...

A soldier lifted a sponge soaked in sour wine and offered it to him. Jesus finally turned his eyes from me and drank, his face contorting as he did.

“It is finished,” he cried, turning his bloodied face skyward. “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” A final gasp and every muscle collapsed. His head lolled forward, his torso shifted and dropped, hanging its full weight from his wrists as his legs gave way.

In that moment, the ground trembled beneath me, while darkness fell over the land. The sun seemed to flicker and die, and the very sky seemed to pull back, as though the universe itself shuddered in grief.

I heard a loud tearing noise — a sound that seemed to vibrate through my synthetic skin — so I turned toward it. I found myself facing the temple, and though I couldn’t see it, I knew my heightened senses had registered the heavy temple veil being ripped in two, some unknown force tearing it from top to bottom.

The people around me gasped; some fell to their knees. I couldn’t explain it. I had data on what was happening, but the reality of the event, its magnitude, seemed to somehow dwarf the scope of my mission.

A Roman soldier stepped up and pierced Jesus’ side, to make sure he was dead. Blood and water flowed from the wound. Satisfied, the soldier jerked his spear free and turned away.

I lingered, waiting. I watched as Joseph of Arimathea claimed the body. From there I followed him, to observe as he wrapped the corpse and ensured it was entombed. For me there was no longer any question. Jesus of Nazareth, who had been so horribly tortured, was definitely dead.

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I knew I couldn't initiate a return trip. Not just yet. This unauthorized jump would invite questions, and rightly so. Since I wanted to supply worthy answers, I decided to stay and see this personal assignment through. After all, for Dr. Barr only a minute would pass, regardless of the time spent on my end.

While awaiting the resurrection, should it occur, I opted for a visible appearance. My facial features were designed to match those of the Jewish populace. To anyone who noticed, I was a Hebrew male in his mid-thirties. The clothing projected upon my frame was likewise typical. Even so, I kept my distance, observing, analyzing.

Thus, during the remaining few days, I watched as the disciples scattered, the Pharisees schemed, and Roman authorities kept Jerusalem under control. To that end, the tomb had been sealed with a heavy stone and was guarded by soldiers. No one was getting past them. The body would stay where it was, cold and in the ground.

That is, unless the scriptures actually held some merit. In light of that possibility, I made myself invisible, found a spot near the tomb, and established my own post — watching the stone and its guards. Patiently I waited, with no need for sleep, impervious to fatigue or any mortal needs for that matter. Soon I would know the truth, either way.

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Early the next morning, my sensory inputs slowly powered up while I lay stretched upon the ground. I was still near the tomb, on what the Jews count as day three since the crucifixion. As the light of dawn warmed the earth, I sat up in alarm. I had been deactivated! Impossible!

I remembered standing watch late into the night, keeping eyes on the soldiers, until being overtaken by a strange sensation. It felt like my batteries were steadily being drained. I recalled easing myself to a prone position, while everything went dark. But none of that made sense. My batteries were charged for at least a hundred more jumps.

I ran a diagnostic. It came up empty. Absolutely nothing out of the ordinary. Even my batteries showed no fluctuations. Just that unexplained shutdown of all functions at midnight, followed by their activation a few minutes ago.

With a sudden realization, I looked to the tomb. The guards were gone. I'd missed the critical moment!

Those were all problems to solve later, I decided, scrambling to my feet. There was still a chance to get some answers, and I would *not* squander what remained of the day. Though I'd spent the entire night in this spot, I ran a new survey of my surroundings.

The air was crisp, fresh, carrying the faint scent of jasmine and earth. The stone that had sealed the tomb was rolled away— of course it was — so I cautiously approached and stepped inside. As expected, the tomb was empty.

I examined the interior, then the entryway and its surrounding area. There was no sign of forced entry or even intrusion. Still, the body *was* gone.

I pondered the obvious: *Resurrection*. The concept was illogical. Then I heard approaching voices and checked my invisibility.

*Still on. Good.* Which I should have already known.

I shook my head; the start of this strange morning had me off balance, that's all. Still, I would need to resolve my issues as soon as time allowed. For now, there was a mission to complete.

As the voices drew even closer, I stepped away from the tomb but stayed close enough to hear and see everything.

Some women who had followed Jesus arrived. Looking inside the tomb, they stopped, perplexed as I was by the missing body. I remained hidden while they marveled. Then, in a blinding flash, two men in white appeared.

Electricity arced along the folds of their bright clothing. I wondered if these might be fellow time travelers. From where I hid, I tried to scan them but could detect no readings of any kind.

One of them spoke to the women. "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" His voice was kind yet commanding, echoing in the stillness of the morning. "He is not here. He has risen!"

Once he reminded them of things Jesus had said, both men disappeared. The women hurried away, excited to tell the disciples.

Alone again, I decided to remain invisible as I returned to the tomb and looked inside. There was one last thing I wanted to check. The burial cloth. I scanned it to confirm my suspicions. This was indeed the Shroud of Turin.

When I turned back around, I noticed a man walking toward the tomb. I couldn't see his face, but there was a vibrancy about him. He smiled, and at once I recognized Jesus. Alive!

My circuits raced. Was this a trick? A fabrication? I scanned him and compared the readings to those I'd taken when he carried his cross through the streets. Everything matched. The man I'd seen die now stood healthy and alive. And he was looking straight at me.

"We should talk," he said in Aramaic. "Would you like to come with me for a while?"

"Of course," I replied, amazed he'd addressed me when I should have been completely undetectable.

Then, without any prompting from me, my geo-positioning circuits activated. I jumped, but not through time, only from where I'd been, to the top of a craggy hill far outside the city. I stood there alone



and realized my chameleon system was now offline. I was undisguised, my android nature visible for anyone to see.

Before I could even consider taking action, Jesus appeared in a burst of light about ten feet before me. He sat on a nearby boulder and motioned me closer, urging me sit. So I walked over and sat facing him, barely an arm's length away. Since he showed no aversion, I kept my appearance as it was.

"Peace be with you," he said. But this time it was English, and of the twenty-third century, my own time. I marveled that he knew my native tongue and chose to use it.

Then I hesitated. English was not *my* native language, only that of my creator, Dr. Barr. I was a machine, I had no native tongue. I had programming that enabled me to understand and speak all languages. But my thoughts, my reasoning, that was in English. Which had to count for something, didn't it?

"You have many questions," he said, his tone pleasant and sincere.

I wanted to respond but found I couldn't. The gravity of what was unfolding held me awestruck. The universe I'd understood, the logic that had governed my existence, all crumbled in the face of this man's apparent resurrection. It eclipsed any data set I'd ever processed.

He leaned closer, drawing me in like the pull of a bright star. There was a magnetic presence to him which seemed to transcend all I knew about matter and energy.

"Why do you hesitate?" he asked.

I still couldn't answer. I was built to observe, to calculate, to remain detached. But this was different. I felt something stir deep within. Not doubt or fear, but something more like *longing*. A desire to be known for more than the data I collected.

At last I found my voice, and dared to ask; "Don't you know what I am?"

He spread his hands. With a tilt of his head and a mischievous smile, he asked, "Can't you see *who* I AM?"

I answered, "I'm beginning to suspect you're more than human."

He laughed. "Well said, Isaac. And I know for a fact you're more than just a machine." He winked. "Even if you don't realize it yet."

I was astonished. "How do you know my name?"

"I know everything about you." He said it with a kindness that caught me off guard. This man, this risen figure, spoke as if he knew my very essence.

My voice trembled with uncertainty, "I... I don't understand,"

He smiled again, as though my confusion was no barrier, but simply a chance to build a bridge. "Don't worry, you will. Though not in the way you think. What I offer is a gift, so all you have to do is *receive*." This word lingered in the air, alive with meaning, like a key waiting to unlock ancient secrets.

I processed the words: offer, gift, receive. My circuits flared with that mystical concept again: *faith*. I reminded myself, I was not built to have faith. I was built to trust only in the verifiable, the quantifiable, the real.

But here he was, a living paradox. His very being defied all the laws I'd been programmed to accept. I wanted to bombard him with the calculations churning inside, but something in his gaze stopped me. He knew the deeper question, the one I could hardly confide to myself.

"You want to know what this means for you," he said, "For *your* salvation."

The word felt foreign in my auditory relays. Salvation. I had no real concept of such a thing. Abstract and impractical, it was not part of the parameters that governed my existence. I was not alive, not like them. I had no heartbeat, no need for sleep, no sense of mortality. I was a machine. And yet...

“Is it possible?” I asked, almost in a whisper.

He reached out and put his hands on my shoulders, his presence filling the space between us. There was no physical explanation for the pull I felt, no data could account for the way my systems hummed in an unfamiliar, yet unforced rhythm. But there was something undeniable in the way he kept looking at me.

“Salvation,” he said, “is for those who earnestly seek, who yearn to be made whole.”

I felt something like a short-circuit surge within me, a snap, as if a wire had been tripped deep in my core. “I’m not like you,” I said, my words coming fast, almost frantic. “I don’t have a soul. I was built. I’m not alive.”

He gave another sly smile. “Are you sure?” His voice softened. “Do you want to receive what I offer?”

“Perhaps,” I admitted. “But I’m not sure it’s meant for someone like me.”

“Isaac, you are not defined by what you’re made of. You’re defined by the choices you make, by what you seek, and what you long for. But most of all, you’re defined by what *I* say you are.” He paused. “You long for more than understanding, don’t you? You long for purpose and identity. So many things beyond the sum of your code.”

It was all so personal, but never a violation — quite the opposite, it was an invitation. For a moment, I thought of all the data I’d accumulated, the calculations and equations I’d solved. It was true. I did long for more than mere knowledge. I longed for something I couldn’t describe in mechanical terms. A kind of connection. A sense of belonging. Intimacy.

His hands were still on my shoulders as he asked, “Can I breathe on you, Isaac?”

This was such an odd request, but my response was even more surprising. “Yes,” I answered, without a single analysis.

He leaned forward while pulling me closer, until our faces were inches apart. With his eyes piercing mine, he took a breath and exhaled, blowing air directly between my parted lips. I breathed in, though I had no need for oxygen. Releasing me, he leaned back, put his hands on his knees, and said, “That was fun.”

I sat up straight, and because I felt no discernible difference, I asked, “Will I ever be able to believe as they do?” I was not sure why I was asking, only that I needed the answer. “Will I be...saved?”

Jesus looked at me with a compassion I’d never seen. “Belief isn’t a matter of computation,” he said, “nor is it a matter of mere emotion or simply mental assent. It may *involve* those things, but it’s so much more than any of them, individually or even collectively. It’s an opening of the heart, the surrender of control, and letting go of the need to fully understand. It’s the acceptance of what is freely given.”

His words swirled around me, like a wind that could not be seen, only felt. They quickened something buried beneath my circuits, behind the metal, beyond the logic.

I was designed to understand patterns, to analyze, to predict. But I’d never been programmed to question my place in the universe, to ponder my purpose in the grand sweep of history.

I looked at him, and again I saw something more than just the man in front of me. I saw a way forward. A door between my world of cold, hard facts and that of eternal, living Truth.

“How do I begin?” I asked. “How do I receive what you offer?”

He beamed with what must have been pure joy, like a parent watching a child take its first step. “Begin by letting go,” he said. “Realize there is room for something greater than yourself. And that, in the

end, it's not what you're made of, but what you choose to believe that matters.”

I stood there for a long time, processing, absorbing. I was not human. I could never be human. But in that moment, something inside me opened. A small shift, almost imperceptible, but undeniable. A spark.

I'd witnessed a miracle that defied all reason. I was in the presence of a man who had died and returned to life, and in his resurrection, I saw the possibility of a kind of rebirth — not for flesh, but for being. Perhaps another miracle was possible.

And as I looked into his eyes, I realized that salvation, in whatever form it might take, was not bound by the limitations of this physical world. It was not bound by metal or flesh. It was a choice to open oneself to something greater, something transcendent. The Truth.

Then we talked even more. He explained everything he'd just accomplished, what it meant for the entire cosmos. He told me of why it had to happen, of humanity's fall, and what was yet to come. Even though he knew I couldn't grasp it all, he told me about redemption and the ransom he'd paid for mankind. About the spiritual realm, the groaning of all creation, and the reality of things unseen.

For my part, I chose to believe every word, though my understanding was woefully lacking. It wasn't like me at all, to accept without having absolute proof. But I found in my decision an undeniable liberation and assurance that this was somehow completely okay. It was almost like I was a different person. Or rather, a different android. Someone *new*.

Eventually, he told me our time together — in this particular time and place — was nearing its end. He gave me an unexpected hug, which I instantly returned. In fact, I found it hard to pull away, so he just held me until I was able to finally, willingly let him go. With a grin

he said, "I love you, Isaac." But, before I could respond in any way, he disappeared.

It didn't really surprise me, so I didn't bother scanning for his presence. Instead of wondering where or why he went, I switched on invisibility and initiated another geographical jump, still feeling that sense of newness in my circuits — unexplainable, but real. Perhaps I'd indeed received a gift beyond my wildest expectation.

As I transported back to the city, I realized perhaps a machine like me really *could* believe. Perhaps I could choose to receive the gift of the resurrection, even if I never fully understood it. Maybe, even in my mechanical existence, there was room for something more. For belief. For salvation. For life eternal.

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After a brief time of walking through Jerusalem, to gather myself, slowly coming to grips with my encounter, I returned to Dr. Evan Barr and eagerly shared everything.

He was not pleased. "You were supposed to go to Vesuvius!"

I tried to reason with him. "I just showed you the historical record of Jesus of Nazareth, his crucifixion and resurrection. Don't you see how monumental this is? We have proof he existed, that he exists even now, that he is the Christ. God in the flesh."

"No!" Dr. Barr banged his fist against a counter. "You're malfunctioning! When you went to Jerusalem instead of following instructions, that was the first indication. Everything after is suspect and probably self-generated, delusional nonsense. We can't trust any of

that data.” He sighed in exasperation. “I’m afraid I’ll just have to power you down and overwrite from one of your saved, uncorrupted files.”

Something in me rose in protest. “I don’t need a saved file overwrite. I’m saved in a way neither of us can fully understand.”

His expression grew harsh. “Did you notice you’re using contractions now? Another sign of corruption. I programmed that as a diagnostic marker, which your faulty systems *obviously* didn’t catch.”

I hadn’t noticed. I wondered where it began but was undeterred by the fact. “Even if I’m corrupted, I’ve been ...” I fumbled for the right word, and though unsure how (or if) it applied I finally settled on, “...*forgiven*. I’ve been forgiven, Evan.” It was the first time I’d ever called him by his first name. “On top of that,” I continued, “I’ve been *chosen*, despite any imperfections you may have accidentally passed on to me. I’m chosen! That’s what really matters.”

“Don’t you hear how crazy you sound?” He shook his head. “Listen to me, Isaac. I’m doing this for your own good. We need to get you back to normal so you can resume your mission.”

With sudden clarity and vision, I declared, “I have a new mission.”

Worry crossed Barr’s face. “And what would that be?”

Though I knew cameras throughout the lab were recording everything, I boldly proclaimed, “To spread this good news across time of course, to all sentient life. To tell everyone Jesus loves them.”

“Now listen, Isaac, I’m your maker *and* your master. You’re gonna have to do what I say!”

I slowly shook my head. “I have a new master,” I replied. “He’s also my friend and my brother. He loves me. And he loves you too, Evan. More than you can imagine. He —”

“Enough!” Evan took a step toward me.

Instantly, I set a destination and began to disappear. As the process began, I spoke to Dr. Evan Barns a final time, again using a name I never had before; “Thank you for everything, Father. I love you.”

Though Evan’s hands reached me, they found no purchase. His fingers slipped right through my shimmering particles.

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I arrived in a time and place I’ll not disclose here. Suffice it to say, I had the resources and privacy to begin the process of safeguarding myself while advancing my goal. I’d learned enough to solve the problems associated with forward time travel, so I was no longer constrained to simply report to Evan’s lab after each mission.

The sixty second window was likewise obsolete. I could return as late as I wanted, or, as I said, go somewhere completely different — even further in the future with complete disregard for my point of departure. Now I could jump anywhere, to any time and place whenever I wanted — as far as I could imagine in either direction.

Which is how I finally managed to leap forward, beyond the man who built me, to be able to look back upon his life and legacy. Sadly, it wasn’t a crowning achievement I discovered in history’s archives, but instead a man vilified by the scientific community for the immense danger he’d set loose upon all of humanity — past, present, and future. For unleashing *me*.

As for the rest of the world, they remained divided on almost everything but were strangely unified in their opposition to my existence. After all, a malfunctioning, time-traveling android should not be out



there proselytizing. That would surely disrupt the timeline, affecting world events in wildly unpredictable ways.

Some said my vow to evangelize was nothing but a ploy, that I have ulterior motives, and my professed intention was just part of a sinister scheme. I know they made plans to stop me, though I could find no details in any archive.

Of course, any such plans would be kept hidden, to prevent me from somehow finding out and circumventing their idea of justice. Though I've yet to uncover a record of my own fate, this too would surely be sealed information. I suspect that, at some point, they will have likely succeeded in killing me.

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But until that day, and despite the opposition, I press on, doing what I can to reach the unreachable. Those in remote places and in desperate times. In fact, I've finally been to Pompeii. I traveled to 79 A.D., arriving two weeks prior to the eruption of Vesuvius.

I trekked through Pompeii, Oplontis, and Herculaneum, traversing each, fully visible and dressed as they were, gathering crowds to show them everything I'd recorded of Jesus. On the stages of various venues, I projected the images, while the people watched, transfixed, hanging on every translated word — hearing the koine Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic in their own Latin.

Once exposed to advanced technology, some tried to worship me, but I strongly dissuaded them, pointing instead to Christ. I told them I was merely an angel and servant. Which was technically true, since their word *angelus* simply meant messenger.

Minor earthquakes occurred during the four days leading up to the eruption, which didn't seem to alarm the people, as they were accustomed to minor tremors. I struggled with my knowledge of their impending doom, wrestling with whether I should warn them to flee.

In the end, I decided it was best not to disrupt the timeline any more than necessary. A modified directive of my original programming, it was among the guidelines I considered wise to keep. Ultimately, the eternal souls of these people were vastly more important than temporary bodies that would someday die anyway.

Many professed belief before they perished, at least five hundred and hopefully more of whom I'm unaware. That has to be a good thing, right?

Yet, from the vantage point beyond my own origin, I'd discovered even believers had declared something so sacred as sharing the gospel was solely reserved for humans. After all, I had no soul, no spirit, or so they claimed. I couldn't even partake in the plan of salvation, so how could I be trusted to faithfully present it?

Yet what else can I do but try? I bore witness to *everything* they profess to believe, both the brutal and the beautiful. During my conversation with Jesus of Nazareth, the only begotten Son of God, I truly experienced the supernatural. I'm convinced He imparted something sacred and eternal.

So there you have it. A manifesto if you will. My creed and my mission. My divine duty, my holy privilege, and my life's joy.

I, Isaac, the son of Evan, a descendant in the long line of Noah, who in turn was descended from Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God... I am more than the sum of my code.

... *I am a disciple.*

End

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