

THE PEOPLE WHO DESIRED TO SEE JESUS
THE PEOPLE WHO DESIRED TO SEE JESUS (JOHN 12:20-23)

During his thrilling evangelistic crusades in Britain, Charles M. Alexander sang at a school for blind children. His renditions charmed the audience, but when he asked if any child had a special request, a small boy lifted a hand and replied: "Please sir, will you sing 'Never lose sight of Jesus'?" The lad was thrilled to hear his favorite hymn, but the light on his face brought tears to the singer's eyes. The scholar could not see the soloist, nor any person in the hall, but evidently he could see Jesus, and appreciated the words of Johnson Catman who wrote:

O pilgrim bound for the heavenly land,
Never lose sight of Jesus.
He'll lead you gently with loving hand,
Never lose sight of Jesus.

The books of the New Testament offered excellent counsel to the Christians of the first century, but nothing superseded that which was given in the epistle to the Hebrews. The writer said: "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:1-2). It is never wise nor safe to cease looking at Christ. When Peter was invited by Jesus to walk upon the Sea of Galilee, he did not sink until he ceased looking at his Master. and when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid: and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord save me" (Matt. 14:29-30). Christians are often surrounded by threatening storms of life, but the only way to walk triumphantly over the things which threaten, is to "never lose sight of Jesus." The New Testament tells of certain people who desired to see the Lord.

The Disturbed Philip... Conferring (John 12:20-22)

Philip was worried! The creases upon his brow indicated he had no idea what to do! A group of Gentiles had sought his aid,

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saying, "Sir, we would see Jesus," but the apostle knew he was confronted with a problem. Jesus and His followers were attending the feast at Jerusalem, and the Lord had been separated from the disciples. He had gone into the inner court of the temple where Gentiles were denied admittance. Greeks who had become proselytes were only allowed to enter the outer parts of the temple area.

The strangers were aware of the restrictions, but believed Philip could arrange an interview with the famous Man from Galilee. Probably their foreign garments indicated they were Gentiles, and their approach caused apprehension for the apostle. They were extremely courteous, but they were Gentiles; their presence could lead to serious repercussions in a place where they were not welcome.

Philip looked at the suppliants, but his thoughts were in a turmoil. He could not take them into a prohibited area, but would he be justified in asking the Lord to come out to meet them? What could he possibly do? Philip was a timid man who was never sure how to solve problems. Then he thought of his resourceful brother, and smiled. John wrote: "Philip cometh and telleth Andrew; and again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus"

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(John 12:22).

When the Lord heard about the request of the strangers, He said: "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:23-24). The Lord's eyes were those of a seer, for beyond the small group He saw a large world of Gentiles waiting to hear the gospel. He knew the only way by which those nations could enter the kingdom of God would be through the redemptive work completed through His death.

The fact that Greeks (Gentiles) had come to Jerusalem to worship at a Jewish feast was exceedingly intriguing. Their countrymen had many gods, but were never sure if they had enough. They, therefore, erected an altar to the unknown god in case an offended deity should complain (Acts 17:23). The Greeks who met Philip had rejected their national faith to embrace

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Judaism. Evidently their questions remained unanswered, and the quest for spiritual satisfaction continued.

After arriving in Jerusalem where all the benefits of their new religion could be enjoyed, they still searched for reality, and risked censure and criticism from Jewish leaders. It had become evident that Jesus of Nazareth was detested by the Sanhedrin, yet in spite of this fact the strangers deliberately sought Him. That fact was thought-provoking. They were about to discover the difference between religious legalism and a vital faith. Could the Nazarene teach them something they needed to know? If so, nothing should interfere with their desire to hear Him. They set an example for all nations. The wisest way to learn about God is to sit at the feet of His Son.

The Determined Publican... Climbing (Luke 19:3)

"And he (Zacchaeus) sought to see Jesus who he was, and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way." Evidently, this tax-gatherer was completely different from the Greeks who met Philip in Jerusalem. They had spent much time debating the pros and cons of comparative religions, and had finally decided that Judaism was better than idolatry.

On the other hand, Zacchaeus could not have cared less about any faith. Ecclesiastical matters were outside the circle of his interest. His god was money, and every day he worshiped at his self-made shrine.

The statement: "And he sought to see Jesus who he was" is interesting. After three and a half years of the most dynamic ministry ever known on earth, it would have been inconceivable that any resident of Palestine would have been unaware of the identity of Jesus. The Lord's message given to the disciples of John the Baptist explained what had transpired within the nation. ". . . Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached" (Luke 7:22-23).

With this kind of thing happening month after month, it

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would have been impossible for Zacchaeus not to know who Jesus was! The text must therefore mean that the tax-gatherer climbed a tree to see which of the party was its leader. Zacchae-

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us had not done this earlier. What he had heard may have caused a measure of interest, but it was not sufficient to generate concern and a desire to meet the Healer.

Jericho was situated in one of the most fertile parts of Palestine. It was on a main highway. The balm which came from the Gilead district was sent through the city and examined by the customs officials. It is believed the Roman authorities sold the franchise to Zacchaeus, who employed other tax-gatherers to share his responsibility. He remained the chief man in the business, and evidently had become wealthy. Luke said: "And he was rich!" His testimony given later to Jesus caused endless discussion. "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold" (Luke 19:8).

Some teachers believe this had been the normal practice in the business affairs of the diminutive official. But, if that were the case, it would be difficult to explain the never-ceasing hatred of the people among whom he lived. They would have known whether or not he was a cheat, or an honest man trying to do his job. It may never be known which of the two interpretations is true, but at least we may be assured Zacchaeus resembled a multitude of men and women who live today.

Probably most people have heard of Jesus. The nations of the Western Hemisphere know about His mighty works, but unfortunately, many remain indifferent. They are only interested in flying to survive in a materialistic world. The Greeks who came to Philip were still seeking something greater than what they possessed. Zacchaeus was apparently moved by curiosity, which made him climb a tree to see the Lord.

The Doubtful Preacher. . . Coming (John 3:2)

When overwhelming problems arise, it is wise to seek advice from an excellent counselor. It was this fact which brought Nicodemus to Jesus of Nazareth; his mind had been challenged by incontrovertible facts. The ruler of the synagogue was an

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excellent student of the scripture and was aware that a very important prediction had been made by the prophet Daniel. "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall even in troublous times. And after three score and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself. . ." (Dan. 9:25-26). Nicodemus knew the predicted time had elapsed, and if there were any truth in the prophet's utterances, the Messiah at that time was an adult.

Constantly, the questions arose in his mind Ä "Can Jesus of Nazareth be our Messiah?" Every day he saw crowds hurrying to hear the new Teacher, and even from within his office he was able to hear the praises of people who had been healed. Evidently there was no other potential Messiah in the nation. If Jesus were the Messiah, the population should know about the fact. If He were not, the prophecies of Daniel were unreliable and foolish. That problem harassed the illustrious ruler, therefore, he "came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him" (John 3:2). That statement revealed his state of mind.

He asked no question; he gave no reason for the late night visit; and his speech ceased almost as quickly as it commenced. The man was embarrassed and nervousÄbut he had comeÄin

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spite of many reasons which could have kept him away. The Ruler was another religious man who believed his faith should be consistent. Nicodemus struggled with his problems and finally admitted his need to meet the Carpenter. A personal confrontation with the Son of God changed his life.

Had he refrained from obeying his instincts, Nicodemus would have been troubled and convicted throughout the rest of his career. There comes a time in the life of every person when problems arise and questions demand answers. Unfortunately many people are too proud to admit their need of help, and they fear adverse comments from neighbors and friends. When men are overwhelmed by spiritual difficulties, they consult a minis-

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ter. It should never be forgotten that through the Scriptures it is still possible to interview Him Who said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). No person should ever question the value of coming to Christ until he has come!

The Delighted People... Confessing (John 4:40-42)

The city of Sychar had been disturbed by the testimony of its most unpopular woman. Dignified ladies avoided her company, and men were afraid to be seen in her presence. She had an irresistible desire for male companionship, and was living with a man whom she had not married. Her attitude and disregard for decency offended the neighbors, but she remained unconcerned. Normally, that woman of Samaria avoided contact with critics, but on this particular day, her voice was heard echoing through the streets. She seemed beside herself as she told her story. She had met a Man Who was different from all others! "He told me all things that ever I did. Is not this the Christ?" (John 4:29). People stared in disbelief; ladies turned away; but the testimony intrigued everybody. Ultimately, ". . . they went out of the city and came unto him" (John 4:30). Evidently Christ was still at the well and as the people stood nearby, He began to preach. When the service terminated, the people said to the woman: "Now we believe, not because of thy saying, for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world" (John 4:42).

The greatest annual attraction in Ancient Corinth was the Isthmian Games, where huge crowds gathered to witness the various events. The favorite spectacle was the relay race, where teams of young athletes carried a lighted torch, which at interval, was passed to a fellow member of the team. The Greeks added a special phase to their language. "Let those who have the light pass it on." The woman whom Jesus met at Sychar's well was a great example of that truth. As soon as she possessed the light, she passed it on to the citizens of Sychar, and became one of the first female evangelists.

The Greeks came to Philip and Jesus because they realized something was lacking in their religious experiences. Zacchae-

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us was suddenly awakened to the fact that throughout his life he had definitely missed something. Nicodemus came because it was the only logical thing to do; he needed information. The people of Sychar responded because they had been stirred by the testimony of a woman. People who dig to find water are very foolish if a fountain of living water is springing up before their eyes. The Savior said: "Come unto me... and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). The only way to discover His ability to fulfill that promise Ä is to come!

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