

THE REMARKABLE JOURNEYS OF JESUS

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Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And, behold, a woman at Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David: my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil (Matthew 15:21,22).

And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people. Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her (Luke 7:11,12).

He left Judea, and departed again into Galilee. And he must needs go through Samaria. Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus the retore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour (John 4:3,6).

It is interesting to discover that although the Savior visited certain places many times, there were others to which He only went once. It may be difficult to explain His actions, but always the special journey led to an extraordinary event. The center of Christ's ministry was indisputably in Galilee, and probably in the city of Capernaum where He preached many of His sermons. Jesus was also a frequent visitor to Bethany, and, since that village was only six miles from Jerusalem, it may be assumed He often visited the city of David. Perhaps He made repeated visits to other places, but it may be significant that the Bible mentions only one visit to Tyre and Sidon, Sychar's Well, and the city of Nain. Apparently the Lord made special efforts to reach those areas, because in each place was a woman urgently needing assistance. The three occasions supply evidence of His concern for distressed people.

The Determined Woman ... Acting

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and Sidon. And behold a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying. Have mercy on me. O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil (Matt. 15:21-22).

The Syrophenician woman was very apprehensive, for she was about to attempt the impossible! Jesus, the Healer from Nazareth, was approaching her city, and, in the presence of a great crowd of spectators, she planned to become an actress. Later when she reminisced, the folly of her attempt would become apparent, but she was desperate. Her daughter's life was in danger.

She had often watched the crowds going south to attend the great meetings in Capernaum and had heard many testimonies of Christ's ability to assist afflicted people. Her neighbors always emphasized the Preacher was a Jew, and their attitude reminded her she was a Gentile, an outsider, a dog! Nevertheless, the condition of her child's possibly recurring attacks of epilepsy was deteriorating. It was said the sickness was related to demon possession and was incurable. Capernaum was about one hundred miles to the south of her home. She had no transportation, and it was unwise either to leave

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her girl or expect the afflicted daughter to travel that distance. Then one day she heard that Jesus was about to visit her city. Could it be possible that He would help her? The Jews would be indignant at the suggestion, but when she considered the possibility, she became excited. The Man from the south did not know her. If she dressed as did the Jewesses in her community it might be possible to deceive Him. She spoke Hebrew fluently. Her plans to deceive the Lord were pathetic, but sincere.

The crowds were jostling each other for better viewpoints and the Lord was smiling as His party approached the anxious mother. Suddenly, her electrifying cry echoed down the street. "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." Her request was apparently unheard as the Lord continued speaking to His friends. The disciples were embarrassed as they whispered, "Master, if you do not intend to help her, send her away. People are watching and listening. This is not a good start to our visit." He replied. "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." She instantly replied, "If you are sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, help me." Maybe the Lord sighed; she had continued her effort to deceive Him. She was a Gentile, and was not a

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descendant of David. Her initial request "Thou son of Daivd" was an affront to the Hebrew heritage. Her second request indicated she had passed the point of no return. "Woman, it is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs."

The mother trembled. for she had failed in her task. No person could deceive Jesus. He understood her inmost thoughts. Her hair was probably touching the ground when that realization overwhelmed her soul. Then suddenly. she put back her head. looked into His face, and said. "Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." Even the angels might have smiled when Christ replied. "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt." And her daughter was made whole from that very hour. "Of course, little lady. I shall be thrilled to grant your request. but that could not be done until you were honest both with yourself and with Me."

Then a strange thing happened. "Peter. John, all of you. let us return." There is no record that Jesus performed any other miracle nor addressed any audience in the area. Apparently His only reason for visiting Tyre and Sidon was to meet that devoted mother. The next verse in Matthew's gospel says: "And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee: and went up into a mountain, and sat down there. And great multitudes came unto him" (Matt. 15:29). This was His only visit to Tyre and Sidon. Temporarily He had abandoned the crowded meetings in Capernaum to visit a helpless woman who lived one hundred miles away. How great were His perception. patience. and power.'

The Defiled Woman.. .Asking

Perhaps the disciples of Christ were disturbed as they trudged along behind their Master. The day was disgustingly hot, the atmosphere heavy and oppressive, and the dust disturbed by many feet clung as a thin layer of cement to their perspiring faces. Every sensible citizen was about to enjoy a siesta, and even the dogs were beginning to sleep. Why the Lord could not wait a few hours until traveling conditions improved was difficult to understand!

"And [Jesus] must needs go through Samaria. Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on

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the well: and it was about the sixth hour" (John 4:4-6). The disciples looked at the nearby city and made their excuses to leave. It was lunch time. They were hungry. The shops would soon be closing for several hours.. Provisions were needed! It is not known how many disciples were with the Lord on this occasion, but in any case, one man could have purchased all that was needed. That they all went into the city indicated their intense desire to escape from the heat. It was regrettable that they missed one of the most thrilling episodes in the life of the Savior. If all the disciples went into the city. how did John know the details of a conversation he never heard'? Is it possible that at a later date the Lord told His friend all that transpired on that unpleasant afternoon'?

"There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink. . . . Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" (John 4:7, 9). The Samaritans were related to the Hebrews who were permitted to remain in the land when the rest of the population was taken to Babylon. They intermarried with pagans. and when the prisoners returned from captivity, animosity increased between the two parties. Samaritans believed that a sanctuary had been erected by Joshua on Mount Gerazim, and they accused the Jews of erecting an unauthorized temple in Jerusalem. Samaritans and Hebrews detested each other, and this fact made the woman ask, "How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria'? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans."

The Lord responded by saying: "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee. Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water" (John 4:10). That woman resembled modern people who have no conception of Christ's ability to supply spiritual refreshment. She was evidently astonished when He said. "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whoso drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst: but the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of living water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:13-14). Yet. even then she did not comprehend the meaning of His statement. She replied, "Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw" (John 4:15). Her eyes were only opened

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when she discovered He knew the secrets of her sinful life. When she testified to the other Samaritans she said. "Come. see a man which told me all things that ever I did: Is not this the Christ'?" (John 4:29). Her influence on the townspeople was evident when they said: "Now we believe not because of thy saving: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ. the Savior of the world" (John 4:42).

It was only then that the reason for Christ's visit to Sychar's well became evident. His mission had been accomplished: He never went there again. Evidently He saw the end from the beginning. He knew the immoral woman was not permitted to draw' water at any other time, for to be seen in her company was an encouragement for gossip. Yet, when the salvation of many people was in question, no risk was too great to take. The Lord made a special effort to reach the well at midday.

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Jesus only made one visit to Nain, and it is interesting to know He arrived at the right place at the precise moment when He was needed. Probably the mother whom He met was beyond tears. This was the second time she had been bereaved: she was a widow. Age, accident, or sickness had taken her husband. When the man died, her affection was lavished upon an only son. Alas, he also had been taken, and if his mother were like other people, she asked, "Why has God forsaken me?" There appeared to be no reason to continue her life, but the body had to be buried, and wearily, the mother began the journey to the graveside.

The procession was moving along at a normal speed until the pallbearers approached the gate of the city. There was much congestion, for many people of the community were present. Perhaps the family had been well known. Maybe the son had held some public office, and his death aroused sympathy throughout the city. The gateway was narrow, and an incoming crowd

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impeded the progress of the procession. Men tried to move aside to allow the funeral to proceed. but there was not enough room for everybody. The tearful mother was anxious. Her son's body lay upon a plank-like frame which rested on the shoulders of men. The increasing crush from bystanders was distressing. The corpse might fall to the ground. Instinctively she clasped her hands, and then she saw the Stranger.

"And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her. Weep not. And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him [the young man] stood still. And he said. Young man. I say unto thee. Arise. And he that was dead sat up. and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother" (Luke 7:13-15). It was significant that on the day when Jesus visited Nain. He arrived at the precise moment when a funeral procession was passing through the gateway. Had the Lord been a minute later, the funeral would have been out of the city and on its way to the burial ground. Had the Savior been a minute earlier. He also would have been through the gate and proceeding on His way. He knew exactly what he was doing and arrived in time to help a distressed mother.

As far as is known, that was His only visit to Nain. "And he delivered him to his mother." The woman's arms were around her boy, but her eyes were focused on the Savior. Perhaps she never uttered a word, but her face said all that needed to be said. Words could not express the gratitude filling her soul. Until the end of time she would remember the Stranger whose eyes became pools of delight when He saw her grief being replaced by gladness. When she took her boy home the mother probably prepared a meal for him, but her thoughts were with the Savior. She had never met a man such as He. He was the chief among ten thousand, the altogether lovely one, who had come to the city to help her.

To conclude this study let it be repeated that Jesus went once to the following places: Tyre and Sidon, Sychar's Well, and the city of Nain. He earnestly desired to help three troubled women and refused to permit inconvenience to change His plans. This outstanding fact should help people know it is better to look for His arrival than to mourn His absence.

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1. Ivor Powell, *Bible Cameos* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1985), 91-92.

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