

Jesus of Nazareth Passed By

"And it came to pass, as he drew nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the wayside begging; and hearing a multitude going by he enquired what this meant. And they told him that Jesus of Nazareth passed by. And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And they that went before rebuked him that he should hold his peace but he cried out the more, a great deal, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood and commanded him to be brought unto Him. When he was come near, He asked him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight and followed Him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God" (Luke 18:35-43).

Jesus of Nazareth passed by. That title or designation of our Lord is full of wonderful significance. Of that fulness I am just going to take a very little and point it out to you. There were so many Jesus's in the country! It was one of the most common and favoured names among the Jews, derived from far back in the Old Testament. Joshua and Jeshua are in the original the same name. The people in Israel loved that name and frequently gave it to their boys at birth. The country was full of Jesus's. Josephus, the historian, tells us that there were at least twenty well-known Jesus's in the country when our Lord was there. So in some way they had to distinguish Him from the others and they called Him Jesus, the one from Nazareth. Something quite ordinary and common, something without any wonderfully, strikingly impressive association in itself. And Nazareth! Well, we know what Nathanael thought of Nazareth. When someone said to him about Jesus, "We have found the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth", he said, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Evidently it had a bad name. We know that, after His temptation in the wilderness, Jesus went back to Nazareth, and what happened? He met the bigotry and exclusiveness of that little town. The result was that, "They led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, and to cast him over."

Now the point is that this is all of a piece with something in the great divine plan. Naturally it was a handicap; the despised Nazarene, with a common name, not outstanding among all the others in His day and country, and with associations that gave Him nothing whatever that gave Him honour and glory in this world. He carried with Him in this life a handicap. Jesus of Nazareth, until the day of Pentecost, was just a title without honour. And the great divine meaning and significance of that is this; that the *real* values of Jesus are spiritual and not natural. If He is going to mean anything in this world to anybody, anywhere; if there is going to be any glory and honour, it will all be in the spiritual realm. He had none in the natural; indeed, He was at a disadvantage from His birth, in the natural. His whole life was without anything that gave Him place or honour in this world, and His very name was something that carried nothing in this world to commend Him at all. And yet, what tremendous forces have been let loose in this world through that life; what a significance He has really taken on. We know it now; after two thousand years of His influence in this world we know. But we know quite well, it was not because He came into this world with any worldly fame or honour or setting at all; with anything to commend Him to men from this world's standpoint; it is all because of His spiritual meaning and value. And that is the realm in which values are really tested and proved. For all the other passes, however great it is. This is eternal.

And you notice that that is something that the Lord has to say to us all. Association with the Lord Jesus will mean just the same where we are concerned: not what we are naturally, great or small; not our name, title, success, achievements, degrees, or anything; our real value will be spiritual — what we are, and what we have of spiritual measure. So with Him, and if it is so with Him, how true it must be of us. Now, you see, born, brought up, living with a natural handicap, where men uttered His name with something of a sneer, reproach — Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? Don't tell

me that any good can come from there! That is the discounting naturally. The prophet prophesied that he would be despised and rejected of men. And yet, over against it, what spiritual forces!

It does seem so often that, where the greatest spiritual value is, the Lord has to see that there is nothing natural, or of this world, to glory in, where we are concerned. Even though we may achieve something; you might attain unto some position of honour and success in this world, do ever remember that that is not your measure with God. Your measure with God is your spiritual value. And also remember, and I am sure this applies to most of us, we may naturally have what we would call a handicap; we have that which would give us no place of honour among men; we may be of the despised; and when men are looking for qualifications, we might be rejected of men, but that is not the measure at all. The thing that matters is the spiritual measure. And God is set upon that; He is concentrated upon spiritual measure, and if He can bring that out over against natural limitations and things that give us no standing at all, it is all the more to His praise.

In this little story that we have read; here is a man with a handicap, this blindness. He felt it; it pierced him every day; he groaned and cried against it, with all the limitations that it brought to him. In those days there were no schools for the blind, and all that which is provided today to put them on their feet, and make them self-sufficient He had nothing and he was a beggar, a blind beggar, a beggar because he was blind. What a handicap! He was down among the dishonoured, and there were many like that filling the land. Jesus of Nazareth came into his life, and brought in spiritual value. The result was that he glorified God and the people glorified God. The glory of God comes along the deepest channels, and God is at pains to cut very deep channels, because spiritual value weighs most with Him, and explains a lot of His dealings with us. Jesus of Nazareth passed by!

What arose as the issue in this case, and does always arise as the issue when Jesus of Nazareth comes into proximity to a life? The greatest of all issues, I think, bound up with the coming near to us of the Lord Jesus, is nothing less than having our eyes opened, being given spiritual sight. Perhaps spiritual sight is the greatest of all the spiritual values — to see! It brought this man into a world that had been closed to him; into possibilities that were all shut to him: a new world, a new life, a new prospect; everything new, by having his eyes opened, by seeing. And those of you who are familiar with the later spiritual teaching of the New Testament know what a tremendous value is placed upon spiritual sight. We are almost too familiar with the words on that matter, "*The eyes of your heart being enlightened, that you may know ...*". By having the eyes of your heart enlightened you may *know* what is the hope of His calling; what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints; what the exceeding greatness of His power is to us-ward who believe. Those are not small things to know; they are the superlative things for spiritual knowledge; and the word is, they come by having the eyes opened. What a world! What riches! Coming into touch with Jesus of Nazareth holds nothing less than that, the whole question of spiritual sight:

First, for that seeing Him as our Saviour and Lord — *our* Saviour, *our* Lord; and then a continual seeing of Him in His great fulness of meaning and value; that is bound up with a touch from Jesus of Nazareth if He comes near. But Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. Maybe He passed by many blind. As we said, there were very many; it was a common malady in those parts. This man came into the values of Jesus of Nazareth because he cried and cried, and He was not going to let Him pass by without securing those values.

Now, that is of very wide application. Of course, in the first place it applies to our salvation. The Lord's Day morning gathering of Christians is not perhaps regarded as the time to preach the Gospel of salvation, but it may be. We have known unsaved people be saved in the morning gathering of the Lord's people. Jesus of Nazareth is here, with all

these wonderful potentialities and possibilities for your life; you might come into a knowledge and a seeing of that which will give you a new world. Are you going to let Him pass by? It is no accident that He comes this way, no mere chance and hap. Or, are you going to say, Jesus, have mercy on me! And not allow yourself to be smothered or stifled by anything, by any kind of consideration — not by public opinion or by the thought of what others will say. No, nothing at all will hinder you; it is so desperately important that you have this new world of His life and light. Are you going to say, and refuse to be silenced: Have mercy on me!?

It is of still wider and more advanced application for us as Christians. There is a sense in which Jesus comes into the lives of Christians, passes their way with the secret desire for something more in their lives, and offers, in His very presence, a greater fulness; offers through ministry, offers through fellowship, offers in this way and that some greater fulness; and His very Presence always means something more now. It means something more this morning. And yet we can let Him go, so to speak; take it all as commonplace; take it for granted. Yes, I believe what you say, that Jesus is nearby, is here; has He not said, "Where two or three are gathered into My Name, there I am"; of course we believe. Yes, but there are momentous things bound up with every contact with Him! And not least is this momentous possibility, that He may go on, and we not get what He meant us to have. And as I have thought about this, I have called to mind so many places and lives that I have known in my life, from my early days of Christian work. I have had contact with people and places, and you know it is true over a wider area but it is true over this very country of ours, in and around this very city of ours, that there are places which were once world famous for their spiritual value. I could mention the names; I could tell you where they are — this outstanding place and that outstanding place. People came to them from all over the world for the spiritual value that they got there; they have a name in history, in tradition, but today they are derelict. You can go there. I think of one where, every time the place was opened, it was crowded with twelve hundred people; there are thirty people meeting in that place today! The building still stands; they still try to carry on — thirty people! They used to have a mighty open-air meeting just a little way off on Sunday night with great crowds; they have got six men trying to carry on that 'open-air' today! And I could repeat that again and again about places where the Lord came, where the Lord was met, but for some reason, like the churches in Asia and the churches in North Africa, in other parts of the world which are in the Bible. Their names are gone; their testimony is gone; it is not there now; Jesus of Nazareth has passed by! The reasons we need not stay to try and enumerate. But it is always like that. The point is: let us make good every opportunity that He gives; see to it that we secure every possibility that is bound up with Him and His presence; that we do not become tragedies like that. There may be a day of great opportunity, and it has passed!

It does not require something very great and wonderful from this world's standpoint; it does not need that to bring us into great spiritual measure. It was not so with Him; it need not be so with us. What does it require? Something of the persistence, tenacity and the whole-heartedness of this man, who said: I am not going to lose my chance; I am not going to lose anything that this time holds for me of possibility; I just refuse to take this as something that is casual, that is, and will, perhaps go on. Not at all! There is always this tremendous possibility on the one side that is wrapped up in Jesus of Nazareth. Do you notice, on the day of Pentecost, when Peter stood up, it was that Name — *"Jesus of Nazareth, a man mighty ... God was with Him ..."*. And Pentecost issued from Jesus of Nazareth! All that in this One, set at nought in this world, not distinguished by anything in this world, but well, He came from Nazareth, that is all! But ... what distinction! When you and I really get to know Him and set our hearts upon knowing all that there is to know in Him, what a world! And for all of us, it is not just for unsaved people, but for all of us, there needs to be this determination, this resolve: I am not going to miss anything of what God has offered me in His Son, and brought into proximity to my life!