

On the day after the visit to the camp by Rebecca and Joseph, Jesus slowly continued his way in the direction of Jerusalem, teaching and healing the crowds who gathered around them. One Sabbath, Jesus was teaching in a small synagogue, and among the congregation there was a woman possessed by a spirit which had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent double and quite unable to stand upright. When he saw her, Jesus paused in his discourse and called her:

“You are rid of your trouble.”

Then he laid his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and began to praise God. But the president of the synagogue, indignant with Jesus for healing on the Sabbath, intervened and said to the congregation:

“There are six working-days: come and be cured on one of them, and not on the Sabbath.”

Jesus looked into his red and scandalised face and gave him his answer:

“What a lot of hypocrites you are! Tell me, is there any one of you who doesn’t let his ox or his donkey out of the manger and take it to water on the Sabbath? Here is this woman, a daughter of Abraham, who has been kept prisoner by Satan for eighteen long years. Was it wrong for her to be freed from her bonds on the Sabbath?”

At these words all his opponents were covered with confusion, while the mass of the people were delighted at the wonderful things he was doing. He turned to them.

“What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it with? It’s like a mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his garden; and it grew to be a tree and the birds came to roost among its branches.”

They understood, so he went on:

“The kingdom of God, what shall I compare it with? It’s like yeast which a woman took and mixed with half a hundredweight of flour until it was all leavened.”

While he was speaking, a woman in the crowd called out,

“Happy the womb that carried you and the breasts that suckled you!”

He responded,

“No, more happy are those who hear the word of God and keep it.”

They left the place and continued their slow progress southward, with crowds from the towns and villages clamouring around him, desperate for healing, or eager to hear anything he had to teach them. The Twelve and the other helpers were kept busy, the days were long and often it was well into the evening before they could rest from their activities. The teaching didn’t end there. Jesus always had something extra for his closest disciples. One evening, he told them:

“There was a rich man who had a steward, and he received complaints that this man was squandering the property. So he sent for him and said:

‘What’s this I hear? Produce your accounts, for I can’t trust you to be my manager any longer.’

The steward said to himself:

‘What am I going to do now that my employer’s dismissing me? I’m not strong enough to dig, and I’m too proud to beg. I know what I must do, to make sure that, when I have to leave, there will be people to give me house and home!’

He called for his master’s debtors to come to him, one by one. To the first he said:

‘How much do you owe my master?’

He got the reply:

‘A thousand gallons of olive oil.’

The steward said:

‘Here’s your account. Sit down and make it five hundred; and be quick about it.’

Then he said to another”

'And you, how much do you owe?'

The reply was:

'A thousand bushels of wheat'

He was told:

'Take your account and make it eight hundred.'

The master applauded the dishonest steward for acting so astutely. For the worldly are more astute than the other-worldly in dealing with their own kind. So I say to you, use your worldly wealth to win friends for yourselves so that when money is a thing of the past you may be received into an eternal home.

The man who can be trusted in little things can be trusted also in great; and the man who is dishonest in little things is dishonest also in great things. If, then, you haven't proved yourselves trustworthy with the wealth of this world, who's to trust you with the wealth that is real and eternal? Now, if you've proved untrustworthy with what belongs to someone else, who's going to give you what's your own?

No servant can be the slave of two masters; for either he'll hate the first and love the second, or he'll be devoted to the first and think nothing of the second. You can't serve God and Money."

As usual, some of the Pharisees had remained, sitting quietly in the shadows and waiting for him to say something they could argue about. They loved money and when they heard this they mocked him.

He turned to them.

"You're people who try to impress your fellow-men with your righteousness; but God sees through you; for what sets itself up to be admired by men is detestable in the sight of God."

Early on the following day, there was an important change and as a result, Jonah found himself separated from the one man who had taken him under his wing.

The hard core of disciples who followed Jesus at this time, numbered well over a

hundred. They were mostly young men and women, although there were a few who were older. Some had been with him from the time of his baptism by John. Some, including James, John and Andrew - and Matthias also, had been followers of the Baptist, but had left him to follow Jesus. Many of the remainder had joined the group in a similar way to Jonah - as a result of accepting the teaching they heard, or as a result of some trauma in their lives.

It was this group which formed the solid core of those who followed the Master on his journeys around Judaea, Galilee and now, Samaria. Thousands flocked to him along the way, to listen, or to bring their sick for healing, but for the most part, they went back to their homes after they had experienced the miracles and the blessings.

Pre-eminent among those who followed, were the Twelve. They were something special, there were tied to Jesus in some instances by blood, being cousins, as in the case of James and John, or second cousins, as in the case of Judas Thaddeus, or James and Matthew, the sons of Alphaeus. In other instances, they had been particularly selected by Jesus, singled out to be numbered to the inner group, such as Philip and Bartholomew, Thomas and Simon of Cana and Judah from Kerioth. That these men had a special task, was evident, for Jesus spent a great deal of time teaching them privately. All this, Jonah had observed, his inquisitive nature couldn't have allowed him to behave otherwise. Now, on this particular day, something special was brewing and it was with his heart thumping in anticipation, that he joined the others grouped around the Master.

When they were quiet, Jesus called out seventy names, Matthias and Barsabbas Justus, were two of them. They stood aside and the group around Jonah became smaller. Jesus turned to the ones he had selected.

"You will go ahead of me into every town and place where I intend to visit. You will go in pairs and you will prepare the way. The crop is heavy, but labourers are scarce. You must therefore beg the owner to send labourers to harvest his crop! Go on your way.

Look! I am sending you like lambs among wolves. Carry no purse or pack, and travel barefoot. Exchange no greetings on the road. When you go into a house, let your first words be: 'Peace to this house'. If there's a man of peace there, your peace will rest upon him - if not, it will return and rest upon you.

Stay in that one house, sharing their food and drink - for the worker is worthy of his pay. Don't move from house to house! When you come into a town and they make you welcome, eat the food provided for you - heal the sick there and say: 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'

When you enter a town and they don't make you welcome, go out into its streets and say: 'The very dust of your town clings to our feet and we wipe it off to your shame. Only take note of this: the Kingdom of God has come near.'

I tell you this, it will be more bearable for Sodom on the Great Day than for that town. Alas for you Chorazin! Alas for you Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the Judgement than for you.

And as for you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to the skies? No! Brought down to the depths! Whoever listens to you, listens to me: whoever rejects you, rejects me.

And whoever rejects me, rejects the One who sent me."

Jonah watched the seventy resolve into thirty-five pairs. It was almost with resentment that he saw Matthias conversing with another young man.

The glade in which they had camped, gradually emptied. The Master and the Twelve walked away in another direction. Jonah found himself left with those who remained, he didn't know them very well and felt shy and tongue-tied. One of the women talked to him, it made his confusion more acute.

"You are Jonah Bar Shimeon?"

Jonah nodded cautiously. She was much older than him, more like the sisters that his

father had married off when he was very young. He had had very little contact with ladies of this age.

"I am Mary, I come from Magdala."

Jonah forgot his shyness momentarily.

"That's very close to Capernaum!"

She eyed him solemnly.

"I do believe it is - that makes us near neighbours and we are going to be friends!"

"Friends?"

"Yes - we all need friends."

Jonah considered the concept. Mary went on.

"I thought you looked annoyed just now?"

"Annoyed?"

"Do you always answer a question with a question?"

Jonah blushed, it grew when he realised she was laughing at him.

"I'm sorry - "

Her smile faded.

"You are a very defensive young man."

"Defensive?"

"There you go again!"

Jonah made a mighty effort to become coherent.

"I wanted to go with Matthias."

"So you were annoyed when he chose Yeshua?"

"Yes - no! I just wanted to go with him."

Mary picked her way carefully.

"The Master has sent them out on a very difficult and dangerous mission. Perhaps, Matthias didn't want to lead you into danger - and the Master DID choose Yeshua - he didn't choose you did he? The Master is never wrong!"

Jonah responded with some passion.

"I'll never be chosen!"

She looked at his unhappy expression and asked softly.

"Why? Why wouldn't you be chosen - perhaps, when you're a little older?"

The answer was slow in coming.

"Because I'll never be a Man in Israel - because I'm a child - and I'll always be a child!"

She persisted carefully.

"Why - why will you never be a Man in Israel, Jonah?"

Slowly at first, Jonah told her the story which resulted in his expulsion from his father's house. Mary expelled her breath slowly.

"So - YOU are the boy!"

He didn't seem to hear her, he went on.

"I'm not Shimeon's son - I'm no one's son! I'm cast out of the congregation! I can't stand before them in my new clothes and read from the Scroll of the Law and then declare to them that from this day I am a Man in Israel and from this time on, it's me and not my father, who accepts the responsibility for my actions!"

Impulsively, she put her arm around his shoulders. He was so immersed in his own misery, he didn't try to pull away. She declared.

"I'll talk to someone about this!"

Then, she was gone. Jonah watched her move swiftly away across the glade and into the grove of olives on the other side. She didn't come back to him that day or that evening, he rolled himself in his cloak and stared up into the clear sky and looked at the sharp pattern of the stars in the clean air.

The group was on the move early the following day. He ate his ration with strangers who were friendly enough, but he didn't know them. He wondered if they would catch up with Matthias during the day, but although they visited a number of villages and towns and although they learned that a pair of those sent out had been there before them,

there was no sign of his friend.

Mary of Magdala was in the group which followed the Master, too, but she made no attempt to renew contact with him. He assumed that she had had no success with what she had wanted to do - either that, or she had lost interest.

The Master taught wherever a crowd had gathered, telling them of the kingdom to come and what they must do to become a citizen. Jonah found himself being as watchful as Matthias had been earlier, scanning the skyline and occasionally seeing a helmeted figure sitting motionless astride a horse, before turning away.

The lawyers and the learned men were everywhere, asking obscure questions on the law and each time, the Master carefully answered them in such a way that they couldn't accuse him of any transgression. At times, the word he spoke seemed only for them, but Jonah soon realised it was for them all.

"When you see cloud banking up in the west, you say at once, 'it's going to rain', and rain it does. And when the wind is from the south, you say, 'There'll be a heat-wave', and there is. What hypocrites you are! You know how to interpret the signs in the earth and sky; but how is it that you can't interpret this fateful hour?"

On one occasion he turned to the crowds and said:

"If anyone wants to follow me and doesn't hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, even his own life, he cannot be a disciple of mine. Would any of you think of building a tower without first sitting down and calculating the cost, to see whether he could afford to finish it? Otherwise, if he's laid its foundations and then isn't able to complete it, all the onlookers will laugh at him. They'll say:

'There's a man who started to build and couldn't finish.'

Tell me, what king will march into battle against another king, without first sitting down to consider whether with ten thousand men he can face an enemy coming to meet him with twenty thousand? If he can't, then, long before the enemy approaches, he'll send envoys, and asks for terms. So also none of you can be a disciple of mine without

parting with all his possessions. In the same way, I tell you, there is joy among the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

Suppose one of you has a servant ploughing or minding sheep. When he comes back from the fields, will the master say:

‘Come along at once and sit down’?

Won’t he say instead:

‘Get my supper ready, fasten your belt, and then wait on me while I have my meal; you can have yours afterwards’?

Is he grateful to the servant for carrying out his orders? So, the same applies to you: when you’ve carried out all your orders, you should say:

‘We’re servants and deserve no credit; we’ve only done our duty.’”

On another Sabbath he was invited to have a meal in the house of a leading Pharisee; and they were watching him closely. There, in front of him was a man suffering from dropsy. Jesus turned to the lawyers and the Pharisees:

“Tell me, Is it permitted to cure people on the Sabbath or not?”

They said nothing and after looking at them for a while, waiting for an answer, he clasped the man by the shoulders and cured him, and then sent him away, then he turned to the Pharisees and asked:

“If one of you has a donkey or an ox and it falls into a well, will he hesitate about hauling it up on the Sabbath day?”

Once again, there was no reply.

He watched the guests scrambling to secure the places of honour, he spoke to them in a parable:

“When you’re asked by someone to a wedding-feast, don’t sit down in the place of honour. It could be that some person more distinguished than yourself has been invited, and the host will then come and say to you:

‘Give this man your seat.’

You'll look foolish in the eyes of the other guests when you're obliged to take the lowest place.

No, when you receive an invitation, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes to you he can say:

'Come up higher, my friend.'

Then all your fellow-guests will see the respect in which you are held. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled; and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

Then he said to his host:

"When you're having a party for lunch or supper, don't invite your friends, your brothers or other relatives, or your rich neighbours; they'll only ask you back again and in that way you'll be repaid for your invitation. Instead, when you give a party, ask the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind; and in that way you'll find happiness. They have no means of repaying you, but, rest assured, you'll be repaid on the day when good men rise from the dead."

One of the guests, after hearing this, called out to him:

"Happy the man who'll sit at the feast in the kingdom of God!"

Jesus nodded and gave another parable:

"A man was giving a big dinner party and sent out many invitations. At dinner-time he sent his servant with a message for his guests:

'Please come, everything is now ready.'

They began one and all to excuse themselves. The first said:

"I've bought a piece of land, and I must go and look after it; please accept my apologies ,

The second said:

"I've bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out; please accept my apologies.'

The next said:

'I've just got married and for that reason I can't come.'

When the servant came back he reported this to his master. The master of the house became angry and said to him:

'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town, and bring me in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.'

The servant did this and returned and said:

'Sir, your orders have been carried out and there's still room.'

The master replied:

'Then go out on to the highways and along the hedgerows and make them come in; I want my house to be full. I tell you that not one of those who was invited shall taste my banquet.'

At the end of several days such as this, during which they continued slowly southward, those whom the Master had sent out, started to return and by the time they made camp one evening, they were all present. Jonah looked eagerly for Matthias and saw him together with his traveling companion, Yeshua. They were travel-stained and obviously weary, but this was counterbalanced by excitement and exhilaration. All seventy were chattering between themselves, exchanging experiences and when the Master came to them, one cried out.

"In your name, Lord, even the devils submitted to us!"

Jesus nodded slowly.

"I watched how Satan fell, like lightning out of the sky, and now you see that I've given you the power to tread underfoot snakes and scorpions and all the forces of the enemy - and nothing will ever harm you. But for all that, what you should be rejoicing over isn't that the spirits submit to you, but that your names are enrolled in heaven."

Jesus lifted his eyes heavenward and cried out in exultation.

"I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and wise, and revealing them to the simple. Yes, Father, such was your choice."

He turned to his disciples and said.

"Everything is entrusted to me by the Father; and no one knows who the Son is but the Father, or who the Father is but the Son, and those whom the Son may choose to reveal him."

He took his disciples aside and in private said to them.

"Happy are the eyes that see what you are seeing! I tell you, many prophets and kings wished to see what you see now, but they never saw it; and to hear that you hear, but they never heard it."

He paused for a moment.

"Don't be concerned little flock; for the Father has chosen you to give to you the Kingdom. Sell your possessions and give in charity. Provide for yourselves purses that don't wear out, and a never failing treasure in heaven, where no thief can get near to it, no moth can destroy it. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be as well. Be ready for action, with belts fastened and lamps alight. Be like men who wait for their master's return from a wedding-party, ready to let him in the moment he arrives and knocks. Such servants can be happy when the master finds them on the alert when he comes. I tell you this: he'll fasten his belt, seat them at the table, and come and wait on them himself. Even if it's the middle of the night or before dawn when he comes, they can be happy if he finds them alert. Remember this, if the householder had known what time the burglar was coming he wouldn't have allowed his house to be broken into. Hold yourselves ready, then, because the Son of Man will come at the time when you least expect him."

Peter asked:

"Lord, do you intend this parable especially for us or is it for everyone?"

The Lord answered.

"Well! - Who is the trusty and sensible man whom the master will appoint as his steward to manage his servants and issue their rations at the proper time? Such a servant can

be happy when he is found doing what he should when his master comes! I tell you this: he'll be put in charge of all his master's property. But if the servant says to himself:

'The master is a long time coming',

And he begins to bully the menservants and maids, and eats and drinks and gets drunk; then the master will arrive on a day when that servant doesn't expect him, at a time he doesn't know, and the master will cut him in pieces. So it is that he'll find his place among the faithless. The servant who knew his master's wishes, yet made no attempt to carry them out, will be flogged severely. When a man has been given much, much will be expected of him; and the more a man has had entrusted to him the more he'll be expected to repay.

I've come to set a fire on the earth, and how I wish that it was already kindled! I've a baptism to undergo, and what restrictions I'm under until the ordeal is over! Do you suppose I come to establish peace on the earth? No, in fact, I come to bring division. For from now on, five members of a family will be divided, three against two and two against three; father against son and son against father; mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother against son's wife and son's wife against her mother-in-law."

There was a great deal of discussion around the fires that evening. Jonah was content to sit and listen, happy that his friend had now returned safely. The conversation with Mary of Magdala was fast becoming a distant memory, so it was a shock later, when they had settled down for the night and the fire was burning low, that Matthias said casually.

"I've been speaking to Mary."

"Mary?"

"Yes - Mary - she told me you've got into the habit of answering everything with a question!"

Jonah was silent. Matthias persisted.

"She told me you have some problems. First, it seems you didn't like it when I was sent off with Yeshua - you thought you should have gone with me - Second, it seems that you're never to become a Man in Israel!"

Jonah was quite certain Matthias was laughing at him, he wondered how many more, laying in their cloaks nearby, were doing the same.

"Don't you have something to say?"

"Mary told me that I wasn't chosen by the Master."

"Did you expect to be? Tell me, Jonah, what would you have done if you were attacked by a demon which had possessed a child?"

Jonah answered after a moment.

"I don't know."

"Yeshua was so attacked and we commanded the spirit to be gone in the name of the Master - would you have done that?"

"I don't know."

"Yeshua and I DID know - and that's the reason why you weren't chosen. The work we did was hard and dangerous - you were spared. Tell me, Jonah, can you be sure that when you pick up a viper, or tread on a scorpion, that it won't bite you and that you'll not swell up and die in agony if it does?"

"No."

"One of the others was bitten by a scorpion, but by the power of the Master, it didn't hurt him - if you don't believe me, I can tell him to show you the marks!"

"I believe you - I'm sorry, Matthias."

There was a little pause.

"This other matter - it worries you?"

"Yes - I'm cut off from the congregation of Israel."

"And that matters to you?"

"If I'm not Shimeon's son - then, I'm a bastard and a bastard is cut off from the

congregation of Israel unto the tenth generation."

"I would like to talk to your Rabbi Samuel, he instructs his proselytes with a mean selection from the Law!"

"It's true - The Law says so!"

"I'm sure it does - well, young Jonah, at worst, you're only a technical bastard! We'll find an answer - and you will become a Man in the Congregation of Israel!"