

CHAPTER 64

On the way to Jerusalem

Matthew 20 vv.17-19.

Mark 10 vv.32-34.

Luke 10 vv.31-34.

The Jewish Passover feast is approaching! All over the country the Jews are preparing for the journey to Jerusalem. In those days thousands of Jews no longer lived in their fatherland. They were the "dispersed" Jews, and they lived in Egypt, in Greece and, yes, even in Rome itself. But the land of Canaan remained their fatherland.

Many of them made the great journey to the temple in Jerusalem year after year, in order to celebrate there the Passover feast.

The roads in the land of Canaan became crowded. It is taken very ~~xixx~~ seriously. The Jews who live in Galilee are the first to set out.

Do you still remember the little map in Chapter 14? If not, just turn to it. There you can see that the Jews in Galilee did not travel through Samaria, but crossed the Jordan near the lake of Gennesaret, walked southwards through the country of Perea and re-crossed the river somewhere near Jericho. On the way many were added to their numbers. The closer they came to Jerusalem, the greater the crowd of Passover travellers became.

Well then, once again the same place draws them. These journeys were sociable occasions. Friends and acquaintances met each other.

This time they are talking more often than not about Jesus of Nazareth, the great Prophet. The Galileans especially have deep respect for Him in their hearts. Of course they do not believe that He is the Son of God, but they are certain that He is a great Prophet.

"Is He likely to come? ..."

That is the question which is on every tongue. They think it over. They hope He will. Who knows, perhaps He will again work great miracles. Many have a secret hope that He is indeed the true Messiah. O, then at last they will be released from the hated yoke of the Romans. Then at last they will be free.

They are all dreaming of an earthly kingdom. They make their way to Jerusalem this time full of expectation.

So, boys and girls, these were the kind of thoughts and discussions of thousands of Galileans as they made their way towards their capital city.

Jesus too, with His disciples is on the way to Jerusalem. Look, there they walk. The Lord walks ahead and His disciples hang back. No, the disciples are not happy or enthusiastic. Their faces are gloomy and sad. They are nervous.

Why is that? ... It is so dangerous in Jerusalem for their Master. The Pharisees who live there want to kill Him. The Sanhedrin hates the Lord.

In the Bible it says: "(The disciples) were amazed." O, why is the Lord Jesus going to Jerusalem? ... Surely it would be better for Him not to go? ... Their eyes show ill-concealed fear. They would much prefer to remain in some out of the way place.

But they notice that their beloved Master is quite determined to go. Jesus walks ahead and they follow hesitantly, with heavy hearts. They follow reluctantly - Jesus really has to draw them on.

What will happen there? ... They do not know, but they fear the worst. How will it all end? ... They know not, but their hearts are full of anxious fears.

Suddenly the Lord Jesus turns and calls His disciples to Him.

Solemnly He tells them: "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and ... there I shall be taken prisoner by the chief priests and scribes."

No, those are not His words! Read it in Mark chapter 10: "... the Son of Man shall be DELIVERED unto the chief priests and scribes."

Delivered up ...? By whom? ...

Well, that is something which the disciples do not know, but the Lord Jesus knows perfectly well. He goes on to tell them precisely what is about to take place there. He foretells to them that He shall be put to death. He tells them that they shall deliver Him to the Gentiles, that is to say, to the Romans. He shall be mocked, scourged, spat upon, yes He shall be killed. But ... He foretells to them also that He shall rise again from the dead.

Can you hear how the Lord Jesus knows every detail? ... He knows what terrible sufferings He is going to meet. And yet ... He walks ahead, as though He is hurrying. No, the Lord Jesus must not be dragged to Jerusalem. He goes before His hesitant, fearful disciples.

O children, so often the Lord Jesus is represented as a martyr. But He is in no sense a martyr, He is a HERO! Remember this, and never forget it. He goes of His own free will to meet death.

Not from compulsion, but freely offering Himself, He was about to bear the

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wrath of God. Not forced against His will, but willingly shall He pay the debt of sin His people owed. He is in truth the debt-paying Redeemer. In love for His elect He hastens towards Jerusalem. With joy He goes up to Jerusalem.

With joy? ... Yes, for He looks unto the reward of His suffering and death. And that reward is ... the eternal salvation of all those who are His. Them shall He redeem with the rich price of His blood. That is why I repeat and emphasise: The Lord Jesus is not a martyr!

Until this time the Lord Jesus has never once told the disciples so clearly what is about to happen.

And ... do they believe His words? ... No indeed, they do not understand their Master. They do not realize what He means. His solemn words pass over their heads. Still they are dreaming of an earthly kingdom, of worldly dominion. They do not want to believe that their beloved Master shall be put to death. No, He must not die, but live. He must thrust out the Romans and reign as King. He is, after all, surely, to sit upon the throne of David? ... Well then, that is what must happen. And that is why there is no room in their hearts for the words of the Saviour.

If He had said: "Come now, we are going to Jerusalem to drive out the Romans, for I am about to take the crown!" - yes, then they would understand Him better. Then they would not hold back.

Yet the Lord Jesus says no such thing. On the contrary, He foretells His ignominious death!

Matthew 20 vv. 20-28.
Mark 10 vv. 35-45.

A little later the mother of two of the disciples comes to the Lord Jesus. This woman is Salome, the mother of James and John. She asks if both her sons may be given a place of honour in the kingdom which Jesus shall set up. She asks that John and James may sit next to Him when He is upon the throne. One must sit on His right hand and the other on His left. That is really the desire of the two disciples, but evidently they did not dare to ask it themselves and therefore their mother does so for them.

Tensely they wait for Jesus' answer. Will he permit it? ...

But Jesus replies: "Ye know not what ye ask."

He then tells them that this shall be given to them for whom it is prepared. You will not fully understand this yet, children, but I have written it to show you

that they still persisted in the thought of an earthly kingdom. This is a clear indication that they had no comprehension of the solemn words of the Son of God, when He foretold to them of His death.

The other disciples hear what is said however and they are very indignant with James and John. Whom do they think they are? ... They have just as much right to a place of honour as James and John.

Angry glances are cast at the two men, and the Lord Jesus has to put an end to the quarrel by yet again pointing out to them that His kingdom is not an earthly, but an heavenly Kingdom.

Matthew 20 vv.29-34.

Mark 10 vv.46-52.

Luke 18 vv.35-43.

Look, there go all those thousands of Galileans along the road to Jerusalem. They are making good progress. In the distance is Jericho. They have crossed the Jordan for the second time. Very shortly they will have reached Jericho.

Jericho, the city whose walls once, centuries before, had fallen down of themselves. Jericho, where once Achan had stealthily searched for booty. Jericho, the city which had, in spite of the command of God, been re-built.

In the midst of all these people the Lord Jesus is also walking with His disciples.

When and where the Lord had joined the multitude we cannot say for certain. Some think that He had already joined them in Perea. Others think that He had linked up with the Galileans close to Jericho, on this side of Jordan.

Whatever was the case, He is now among them, and the Galileans are proud that the great Prophet of Galilee, their prophet, is with them.

O, they hope that He will be proclaimed king in Jerusalem. They hope that now at last the moment has come when the hated Romans shall be thrust out, that those oppressors will have to flee in shame.

There, close by Jericho, at the side of the road, sits a beggar. He asks alms of those who pass by.

Why is this man begging? ... Is he too lazy to work? ...

No, it is not that at all, he cannot work for ... he is blind. His name is BARTIMÆUS. The inhabitants of Jericho know him well, for he has evidently been there for years. Perhaps those who are going to the Passover know Bartimæus also.

It is very probable that he had asked alms of them on previous years.

Dreamily he stares ahead; his dull glassy eyes in one direction, eyes in which there is no gleam because they are blind. He can hear the sound of footsteps when any pass, and then at once we hear his plaintive cry.

All of a sudden he raises his head and listens carefully. He can hear something. Something unusual. He can hear the sound of a great multitude approaching.

He asks some of the passers-by what the meaning of this may be, and they tell him that Jesus of Nazareth is approaching.

Jesus of Nazareth? ... He has heard a lot about Him. They have quite certainly told him what great wonders have been done by this Prophet: blind receive their sight; lepers cleansed; deaf made to hear; devil-possessed restored and even the dead raised up.

Oh, perhaps in the heart of blind Bartimæus the thought may have sometimes arisen, "If only He would come here!"

And now ... now He is here. He is now about to pass right by him.

Bartimæus forgets his money and with a loud voice he begins to cry as hard as he can: "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me."

Did you hear that? ... He calls "Jesus thou Son of David."

Bartimæus sees then in Jesus more than a prophet. He sees in Jesus the son of David, the long promised King of Israel. He believes that Jesus is the Messiah.

Listen! Again the cry echoes: "Thou Son of David, have mercy on me."

Angry voices rebuke him. The leaders of the travelling group tell him to be quiet. For shame, should a blind beggar shout and scream thus at the great Prophet? That is so rude and such bad manners.

"Hold your peace."

But Bartimæus will not be silent. On the contrary, he cries out even harder: "Son of David, have mercy on me."

O, Bartimæus feels that if he is not healed now, then it will never be. With his face showing signs of the utmost tension, he shouts, he cries for mercy.

Yet though the Jews are annoyed by the cries of this poor sufferer, Jesus is not annoyed. He knows what is going on in the blind man's heart. His soul is filled with compassion.

All at once the Lord stands still and commands one or two Jews who are close to Him to bring Bartimæus to Him.

They obey at once. "Be of good comfort;" they say to Bartimæus, "Rise; He calleth thee."

Immediately Bartimæus gets up. He throws off his coat and they lead him to Jesus. Very soon he is standing before the Saviour. He lifts up his face, full of hope.

"What wilt thou, that I should do unto thee?" Jesus asks him.

And then comes his answer: "Lord, that I may receive my sight." Bartimæus does not say "Lord, canst Thou restore me?" No, Bartimæus knows that, he believes that, of that he has no doubt at all. Jesus is able to restore his sight, but is He willing to do so? Ah, that is something Bartimæus does not know. And that is why he asks prayerfully that he might receive his sight.

Jesus has never yet sent any away who come to Him for help. Neither is Bartimæus sent away.

"Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole."

This is the friendly voice of the Saviour. The great multitude stands silently. All wait and watch tensely.

And what then? ... The light comes back into those dull eyes. Bartimæus can see, he is restored. He sees his Saviour; he sees the multitude; he sees the green trees, the blue sky. His face beams with happiness. Is it surprising that he follows Jesus, that he glorifies God? ... What will have been going on in his soul? ... Now he need no longer beg. Henceforth he can work and thus earn his own living.

The people too are deeply impressed. They too praise God. Respect for Jesus of Nazareth increases. Yes, this is the sort of king they want. A king who will release them from the Romans. A king who can heal their sick and restore their afflicted ones completely. A king who can feed them in a miraculous manner. Oh, it could not be better. The joy in the hearts of these Passover-goers is increased. They are full of happy expectation.

A Saviour? ... No indeed, they have no need of that. A dying Surety? ... Not a word of it. For the PRINCE OF LIFE there is no room in the hearts of thousands. No, they long for an earthly prince, who shall save them from the hated enemy. They want a king who shall make them free; a king like David of old. That is the longing of their hearts.