

FACING TOWARD JERUSALEM

by Lester J. Start

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First Baptist Herkimer, NY

There is a tone of somberness which dulls the bright colors of the Palm Sunday scene. The picture of the triumphal entry is a glorious one - the fanfare of trumpets sounds in our ears mixed with the shouts of the children, the gay colors of the costumes of the people, the sunlight sparkling over the scene, the first soft greens of spring strike the eye of our imagination with all the pulsating warmth of glowing life. It is the life of springtime, with the beauty of its resurrection of growing things in nature and the rebirth of new hope and joy in the human heart. It is the time "when spring unlocks the flowers to paint the laughing soil". Joy and thankfulness are reflected in the happy faces of the throngs as they recognize and give homage to their Lord and King.

But just as the bright golden warmth of a sunlit spring day is chilled as the shadow of a cloud suddenly obscures the landscape, so the pure joy of Palm Sunday is darkened as a shadow is cast over the scene the shadow of the cross. This is the note of somberness that dulls the bright colors. We sometimes think the picture would be better if we could remove that shadow, happier somehow. And yet as we survey the whole drama of Passion Week, we know that without the shadow of the cross, the glory of the resurrection would be impossible, without the strong discord of that dark Friday when the earth trembled, the wondrous resolution of the angelic voice of Easter morn, saying, "He is risen," could not have occurred; without the cross there could have been no crown. And so with the eye of faith, we take a deeper look at the Palm Sunday scene, and the going up to Jerusalem takes on a deeper meaning, - not one of sheer joy and happiness, but one of strong and serene confidence in victory over evil. Facing toward Jerusalem reminds us that we march in to the call of duty to God, not dance to the piping of amusement, that we live not so much to attain empty enjoyments as to achieve enduring happiness and goodness. And so the new colors take a deeper hue, not so gay, perhaps; but in a truer light.

As we look at the Palm Sunday scene in the truer light, we are impressed with the adamant conviction of Jesus that he must go up to Jerusalem. He did not have to, the choice was his to make. He was even advised not to go. Simon Peter in Caesarea Philippi did so. It was when Jesus announced that His going to Jerusalem meant that He would suffer many things of the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be put to death, and rise again the third day. When Simon Peter said, "not so, Lord", remember what Jesus answered? In a firm rebuke, he said, "Get thee behind me, Satan, thou art a stumbling block unto me, for thou mindest not the things that be of God but those that be of men." This event shows plainly that it was not an easy decision for Jesus to make, to face Jerusalem and the suffering this involved. The temptation must have been great to go another road, - back home, perhaps, to the beautiful countryside of Galilee. To be sure, no great works could be wrought there because of the unbelief in the local prophet, but Jesus at any rate would be free from the cruel Roman power resident in Jerusalem, and also the priestly hierarchy. He could find refuge in the bosom of his family and enjoy old associations. But Jesus knew that "you can't go home again". And, more important, he knew that one cannot avoid the great tasks that God sets before us. The temptation to do so was great. Why else would he score

Simon Peter so severely as the tempter Satan? Simon, who was interested in Jesus as welfare. The agony in the garden shows that this was a terrible road for Jesus to travel, as he will look forward to the suffering on the cross. But, as the gospel accounts tell us, Jesus steadfastly set his face to go up to Jerusalem, refusing to avoid the hard tasks set before him.

There is a lesson here for every follower of Jesus. Just as there was a Jerusalem in His life which He, as Son of God, could not avoid, so there is a Jerusalem in the lives of each of us which we as children of God and heirs of Christ may not conscientiously avoid. We cannot escape the Jerusalems of our lives. Following the Master does not mean avoiding them, but facing them. The Palm Sunday lesson for us is face your Jerusalem, steadfastly set your face to go up to Jerusalem in the firm confidence that the power of God through Christ in us can transform our Jerusalem from an arena of suffering and torment to a scene of victory and triumph.

There are those Jerusalems common to every life which we cannot avoid, which we must face. There is the Jerusalem of failure, sickness, death, sorrow. When these come to us, there is only one strong and courageous thing to do, and that is to face them, endure them, as Jesus did his Jerusalem, with patience and hope and faith, and in this faith gain a new strength and life. We can refuse to face our Jerusalems, but we cannot escape them. We find that then they have overcome us and we have not shared in the promise of Jesus in overcoming the world.

A cherished plan, for example, goes wrong, a dream of our lives is shattered, an effort honestly and sincerely made meets rebuff and failure. Two courses are open to us. We can in bitterness and recrimination turn aside from our goal, only to find the cancer of disappointment gnawing at our spirits. Or we can face our Jerusalem - look to see why the plan went wrong, why the dream was broken, why the effort failed. As we face our problem we can turn to the help of God in prayer to help us. Perhaps the plan was wrong to begin with, perhaps the dream a false one, the effort misplaced. God, by helping us measure our motives by the yardstick of the perfect and divine, will help us see the truth. Perhaps the failure was due to our own discouragement and feelings of inadequacy. God will show us the power of the spirit upon which we can draw for a new and more confident effort. The point is - only by facing our Jerusalem can we triumph over it.

The same is true when we face the Jerusalem of sickness and death, in ourselves or in a loved one. Again, we can try to turn aside from the hard teachings of patience and faith which these experiences offer. We can protest and lament, to no avail except to make ourselves more miserable. Or we can face courageously the Jerusalem before us and find even in these evils the occasion for the power and grace of God. We can, with the help of God, emerge from to Jerusalem of sickness and death, ennobled by the refiner's fire, strengthened by the might of God's Spirit.

Hard tasks- don't bypass them.

In facing our Jerusalems we are ourselves transformed, not overcome.

“Whosoever would save his life shall lose it; whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it.”

(The law of life) (parents and children)

Avoid Jerusalem and save life? No - Jesus, Socrates.