

Following Christ Through The Gospels

Part Seven

The Lord Jesus nearly always had people not too far away from Him who wanted to castigate and derogate His work. Generally, these were the Scribes and Pharisees. They knew their Scriptures, - the Old Testament, and their Mishnah, their Midrash, Halachah and Haggadah. They had all their traditions, and armed with such an exhaustive library they went in search of Jesus! They found His disciples 'breaking the law' as they ate bread with ceremonially unwashed hands (Mk. 7:2). However, Jesus dealt with these religious vitriarchs *without mercy*, and judged them to be 'hypocrites' (Mt. 15:7; Mk. 7:6) and 'blind leaders of the blind' (Mt. 15:14). He summed up their pedigree (Mk. 7:20-23).

Jesus then proceeded to Tyre and Sidon, on the north-west shoreline, - He wanted to have some time to Himself (Mk. 7:24). However, even there He was sought and found by a Syro-Phoenician woman who pleaded with Him on bended knee to cast a demon from her daughter (Mk. 7:25ff.). His disciples chose not to attend to the woman's needs and advised the Saviour to dismiss her (Mt. 15:23f.). I wonder if they would have given Him the same advice if that Syro-Phoenician woman belonged to one of their families! In accordance with His sovereign grace and mercy He released the woman's daughter from the devil's power.

He then travelled down through Galilee and along to the Decapolis where again He met the needs of the 'ordinary people' (Mt. 15:29-31; 7:31-37). They remained with Him for three days and, afterwards Jesus fed them with seven loaves and a few small fishes. Altogether there were about 4,000 people (Mt. 15:32ff.; Mk. 8:1-9). At this particular time the Lord Jesus avoided Jerusalem because of the threat upon His life (Jn. 7:1). However, the Pharisees and Sadducees were never too far away. They sought to detract Him from His work. Jesus summed them up, "a wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign" (Mt. 16:4). As far as Christ was concerned they were 'time-wasters', and He left them. He instructed His disciples to avoid such people (Mt. 16:12).

Passing through Bethsaida He healed a blind man (Mk. 8:22-26) and then He moved on into the towns of Caesarea Philippi. It was there that Simon Peter declared of the Saviour, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt. 16:16, *Σὺ εἶ ὁ Χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος*; Mk. 8:29; Lk. 9:20). This marked the pinnacle of Christ's ministry among His disciples. From there "charged He His disciples that they should tell no man that He was Jesus the Christ" (Mt. 16:20). However, when He told His disciples that He was now travelling towards Jerusalem and death Peter took Him to the one side and chastised Him; Jesus rebuked Him severely (Mt. 16:23; Mk. 8:33), and went on to reiterate the cost of discipleship (Lk. 9:23-26). He further assured them of the coming Kingdom (Mk. 9:1)

Six days later He brought His 'inner circle' (i.e. Peter, James and John) up to the mountain He was transfigured [*μετεμορφώθη*] before them and He stood with Moses and Elijah. [See Ex. 24:16; Ps. 2:7; Dt. 18:15. Peter later referred to this incident in II Peter 1:17,18.] Notice what direction the disciples fell! Following the transfiguration Jesus explained to the disciples the significance of John the Baptist's ministry in relation to Elijah (Mt. 17:10-13).

The Saviour was no sooner down from the mountain than a man approached Him to heal His demon-possessed son. The man had already brought the young boy to the disciples but they were hindered from healing him because of the peoples' lack of faith. Jesus' humanity was demonstrated towards their unbelief (Mk. 9:19ff.). Note the Scribes were still in the background (Mk. 9:14). Nevertheless He subsequently healed the youth. Remaining in Galilee He further instructed the disciples concerning His imminent death (Mt. 17:22f.; Mk. 9:31; Lk. 9:44).

Such were the times for the Lord Jesus. He had His encouragements, He also had the more wearying moments. While the enemy was always lurking in the background, even some of His own disciples demonstrated traits that caused Him concern and despair. Yet, He treasured His own; His hold upon them was sure and none of them, - save the 'son of perdition', - was eternally lost. Indeed, what was it that kept Jesus on the road to Golgotha? Nothing less than to carry out the will of His Father in that He would die on the cross the righteous servant to justify the many, in order that He bear their iniquities (Is. 53:11). ... "The cross before Him, the world behind Him!"