

# Gleaners Bible Studies C 8

## UNUSUAL ENCOUNTERS WITH CHRIST

### Study 1

#### IN THE TEMPLE - A WOMAN

Read

John 8: 1-12

The Lord Jesus was always surrounded by people. Everywhere He went the crowds followed Him. Many came to Jesus because of their needs. For others, He was the popular figure of the day and it was the 'in thing' to know all about Him and His deeds. Doubtless for some the attraction was only that of curiosity. As the centre of such crowds, the Lord found it difficult to find time to be quiet. Very often, when people were in their beds, He would be out on the mountainside, praying. Yet, with all the time consuming pressures that the crowd put upon Him, He still found time for individuals. Every single person mattered to the Lord Jesus. This is still true - the personal needs of the individual are His greatest concern. Christianity is not just about crowds - each of us, with our own needs and problems can enjoy a personal Saviour.

The story told here in **John 8** is an interesting example of the concern of Jesus for individual men and women He met. Let us imagine the situation in which the event took place.

Jesus had spent the night on the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning, He came to the Temple, probably straight from a time of prayer. The people flocked to Him and He sat down to teach them. The crowd listened intently to Him because **"He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes."** (Matthew 7: 29)

Suddenly the peace was broken. The scribes and Pharisees came into the circle, bringing with them a woman who was caught committing the sin of adultery. Notice in **verses 4-5** their ruthless, almost cruel way of handling the situation. Sin demanded punishment: according to the law she must be stoned. Jesus ignores them and remains sitting, writing on the ground with His finger. They press Him for an answer as to what should be done. He replies: **"He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first."** (verse 7)

**Let us break from the story for a moment to look at the interview between Jesus and the Pharisees.**

What had He to say to them? He agreed with all that the law said about adultery in **Exodus 20: 14, Leviticus 20: 10 and Deuteronomy 22: 22-24**. Jesus gave assent to these commands. He knew all about them and in no way went against them by treating this woman as He did. What He did do was to throw His penetrating challenge into the lives of these self-righteous people. They had not committed adultery, and to them this woman was shameful - an outcast. But the Lord Jesus showed them that only if their own lives were sinless did they have any right to judge, and cast stones at this woman they had brought into the

Temple. Jesus not only came to deal with adultery, but with ALL sin. Watch these men now. As Jesus silently writes on the ground, one by one they leave, beginning with the eldest, leaving Him alone with the woman. We say, 'People in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.' We must learn that self-righteousness and pride have no place in the presence of the Lord Jesus. Because of the tragedy of sin in human lives **"there is no one righteous - no, not one"** (Romans 3: 10). Bold and critical though the Pharisees were, they could not face the challenge of Christ. They stood condemned in His presence.

**Now let us look at the interview of Jesus with the woman.**

Can you imagine the atmosphere created as Jesus wrote again in the dust and the Pharisees and scribes quietly disappeared? We read these words - **"Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst."** Silence often condemns. Some have complained that the Lord Jesus gave the impression that He treated this sin lightly because He did not openly voice His disapproval. But this is a totally wrong understanding of what He was doing. Notice **verses 15-16** of this chapter. The Lord Jesus said that He had not come to judge men - He had come to save them. But if He did Judge, then His judgement was always true. His presence was bound to make this woman feel guilty about her sin. Then as He breaks the silence, He asks where her accusers have gone - **"Has no one condemned you?"** Where was the first stone? She answered humbly, **"No one, Lord."** Remember here, that in the presence of the Lord Jesus, who is God, all sin is unmasked. We can hide nothing and we are exposed for what we really are. It is good to notice as we read this passage that the Lord Jesus did not waste words. He said two important things to this woman. Look at them carefully:

#### 1) "Neither do I condemn you."

In other words He forgave her, her sin. He lifted the burden from her heart. Because of Calvary, God can do just that for us. The Lord Jesus knew, as He spoke these words, that only because of His coming death on the Cross could He deal so kindly with this woman. **1 John 1: 7** tells us the real truth about this.

#### 2) "Go and sin no more."

The scribes and Pharisees wanted to put an end to the woman, but Jesus wanted to put an end to her sin. **"Sin no more,"** He told her. He forgave her, so from then on her life must be different. So, it is with Christians. Cleansing from sin must affect our conduct. Sin must be left behind and a new life must be lived, through God's power.

**"He did not come to judge the world,  
He did not come to blame,  
He did not only come to seek,  
It was to save He came.  
And when we call Him 'Saviour',  
we call Him by His name."**

## Study 2

### A MOTHER AND HER SONS

Read

**Matthew 20: 20-28**

It is easy to find reasons for criticising the woman who came with her two sons to the Lord Jesus. The interview was strange and must have saddened the Master. We must remember, of course, that the weaknesses and failures of human nature did not take Him by surprise. John tells us that He knew what was in man, in **John 2: 23-25**. Yet, it must often have been difficult for Him to have to endure. This encounter we are studying concerned two of His most loved followers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. We would be quite justified in wondering what they were up to, even if we put the blame on their mother. 'They should have known better,' we would say. Self-seeking and self-advancement are contrary to the Spirit of Christ. The Lord Jesus Himself was always teaching that.

Let us watch how the Lord Jesus dealt with the situation. Notice that He did not withdraw from them in disgust, or push them away with a harsh refusal. This would have ended the encounter and no doubt, the other disciples would have said that they deserved it. Instead, with His wonderful skill, He used the occasion to teach an important lesson. He always showed His respect and patience towards those who came to Him. He made them feel that they mattered, even though they made mistakes. It would be good, as Christians, to take an example from Him in His kindness shown towards others. It is so easy to 'write people off' because they do not fit in with our way of thinking. Patience and understanding make for happy relationships.

Matthew tells us that this mother worshipped Jesus. That is good - worship should always come first. But now look at the request, **"Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom," verse 21**. The mother wanted the highest place for her sons. Possibly, she had the best motives in asking this; on the other hand it may be that she asked purely out of personal pride. When we think that the Lord Jesus was treading such a humble pathway as the rejected King, we realise just how much out of place the spirit of this request was.

**Now notice the answer. Verses 22-23 are interesting from two points of view.**

**Firstly**, the disciples committed themselves to a way of suffering which was similar to that which the Lord Jesus Christ was to take. The **"cup"** was symbolic of His suffering on the Cross. This, Jesus said, they would share. It is true of all the apostles that in later years they suffered for their Lord and some of them were martyred. It was no light matter to commit themselves to such a path, but the Lord Jesus took them at their word. We ought to be careful in committing our lives by word to any pathway, in following the Lord Jesus. It has been said that it is easy to allow our lips to take us further than our feet are prepared to follow. Always remember this in your attitude to discipleship.

**Secondly**, notice that the request was not granted, because it was not the Lord's prerogative to grant it. The Lord Jesus

was honest and fair in His answer. There would be places near the throne which God had prepared for some to share, but the right of privilege was in the hands of His Father. Whether their desire was right or otherwise, the Lord Jesus could not grant it. He graciously put the whole business in its right place. It is possible that this was the point at which these two disciples were set on the pathway of suffering by the Lord Jesus. For it was only by taking that path that glory would eventually be theirs. Compare **Romans 8: 16-18; 2 Timothy 2: 11-12**.

**Now look at the sequel to the encounter in verses 24-28.**

The Lord Jesus taught the meaning and the measures of true greatness. It is helpful to read **Luke 22: 24-30** in connection with this passage. Angry disciples condemned their two friends, yet Luke tells us that the contention was among them all. The Lord Jesus quietly pointed out that the idea of true greatness lay in the humble spirit of service. Whoever desired to be great must be minister and servant to all. This was contrary to the idea of the nations, **verse 25**. The whole concept of worldly greatness lies in the saying that 'might is right'.

But for Christians, being humble, gracious, and kind in our consideration of the needs of others will lead us into the way of true greatness. Great Christians of the past who are still remembered for their work for the Lord have been marked by this spirit of concern for others.

We end by considering the example of the Lord Jesus Himself. This is the most valuable point of this unusual encounter with Christ. **"He did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."** (**verse 28**) We think of a Saviour today who is on the throne, and who will one day, reign as King of Kings; but we also remember how He reached this place of power. Let **Philippians 2: 5-11** and **Hebrews 12: 2** give you the answer as we bring our study to an end.

## Study 3

### ON THE MOUNTAIN - MEN OUT OF THE PAST

Read

**Luke 9: 28-36**

The story of the transfiguration is important in the life of the Lord Jesus. Each of the first three Gospels - the synoptics - records it. It gives us a glimpse of the glory that was possible in His life. Have you ever wondered how it was that the Lord Jesus, who came from the brightest majesty and glory of Heaven, could assume such an ordinary life? Think of His simple way of life and its attendant poverty. What glamour was there in being just a carpenter's son? Nazareth was an obscure place and often Jesus chose tax-gatherers and sinful people for His companions. Yet, He was God's Son - equal with God in every way. Where was His glory? He veiled His majesty and glory in a human body. He came as a very lowly Man because He loved us so much and wanted to save us from our sins. This is the wonder of the Christian message. He became like us - apart from our sinfulness - in order to reach us.

On the mountain with the three favoured disciples, His glory shone out in a tremendous way. Notice what each gospel says about the glory. Brilliant light, like the shining of the sun, came from His person. **"He was transfigured before them."** (**Matthew 17: 2**) Peter could not forget this - even

many years after when he was writing his second letter. **"We were eye-witnesses of His majesty"**, he says in **2 Peter 1: 16-17**. It was in the atmosphere of this glory that the unusual encounter with Moses and Elijah took place, two figures from out of Israel's history, yet they stood with Jesus on the mountain. It is this part of the story, which deals with Jesus and these two great men, that we are going to look at together. It is worth studying carefully.

#### Who was with Jesus?

First, there was Moses, the great law-giver, who led God's people from slavery. Second, there was Elijah, the great prophet, who was sent by God to call the nation from its sinful ways back to Him. Their place in the history of Israel and in the esteem of the people gives great meaning to this event. If you look back to Exodus you will find a time when Moses went up into Mount Sinai to receive the Law from God. From that time God entered into a covenant, or contract, with Israel, and He promised to be their God and be with them if they kept His law. Their experience proved that during the lifetime of Moses and all through their changing history, they continually broke God's law. The days of Elijah came and in **1 Kings 18** you will read that Elijah ascended Mount Carmel with the wicked prophets. His challenge was, **"If the Lord is God, follow Him."** (**1 Kings 18: 21**) Yes, the nation needed a prophet to call them back to God. These two great men had passed into history, but now they were on the mountain with Jesus. What had Jesus to offer that surpassed that which Moses and Elijah stood for? Why this encounter?

#### What did they talk about?

**"They appeared in glory (with Jesus) and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem."** It is very important that we should notice this; only Luke records it. We know that His decease at Jerusalem was accomplished when He died on the Cross. The word 'decease' could also be translated here as 'exodus'. So Luke is saying - that Moses and Elijah would have known all about it - that when the time came for the Lord Jesus to go out of this world through His death at Calvary and His resurrection, it would be like an exodus. This reminds us that the glory of transfiguration was soon to pass; Jesus had to come down from the mountain in order to die for us on the Cross. We can be thankful that He did not go back to Heaven from the Mount, for He was pure and sinless enough to do this. The fact that Moses and Elijah, who represented a wayward and sinful nation, were talking about Calvary, teaches us this vital lesson: while the Lord Jesus could display such majesty and glory He must come down from the Mount and know the shame of the Cross in order to save us. Remember this!

#### How did it end?

Peter wanted to keep the scene as it was with three dwelling-places. He was bewildered and uncertain as to its true meaning. God covered all with a cloud, and when it was all past, **"Jesus was found alone"**. (**verse 36**) What does this mean for us? Moses and Elijah had their part to play and their message to give. In their time they had fulfilled their task. Now Christ is here, He has come. God says, **"This is my beloved Son. Hear Him."** (**verse 35**) God's last word to men is in the Lord Jesus Christ: see **Hebrews 1: 1-3**. Through His 'decease' - His work at the Cross - He is able to meet our deepest need. Moses and Elijah could never do this.

#### The majesty and glory faded.

The encounter ended with the disappearance of Moses and Elijah, but the wonderful person of Jesus remained. This is how God intends it should be, **"that in all things He may have the pre-eminence"**. (**Colossians 1: 18**) Remember that the appearance in glory on the mountain was just a foretaste of what will be in the future when the Lord Jesus comes. Only three disciples saw Him then. When He comes in His glory to reign, every eye shall see Him, and all will then acknowledge Him as Lord.

## Study 4

### HEROD - 'THAT FOX'

**Read** **Luke 23: 1-12,**  
**(Compare Luke 9: 7-9)**

The interview we are now about to study is perhaps the strangest of all. It took place during the darkest time in the life of Jesus. It fulfilled a desire of King Herod, but brought him no rewards or satisfaction. Not a word was spoken by the Lord Jesus. Out of it, Herod of Judea and Pilate of Rome became friends. It left Herod in his wickedness, condemned by the silence of Christ.

#### Who was this man?

There are several Herods spoken of in the New Testament. There is the Herod of **Matthew 2: 3**. He was responsible for killing the baby boys in an effort to get rid of Jesus. This Herod was known as Herod the Great. His death is recorded in **Matthew 2: 19**. We read then of Archelaus, his son, reigning in his father's place. (**Matthew 2: 22**) The Herod of our lesson was the fourth son of Herod the Great; Herod Antipas was his name. When his father died, he was given Galilee and Peraea. Here was an exceedingly wicked man. If you read **Matthew 14: 1-12** you will see how he was indirectly the cause of the death of John the Baptist. We read in **Matthew 14: 9** that Herod was sorry to give the command for the death of a man whom he respected and feared. As he heard of the great effects of the power of the Lord Jesus and also of the works of His disciples, his conscience troubled him. He was reputed to be superstitious by nature and he imagined that John the Baptist had come back from the dead, (**Luke 9: 7**) **"John I have beheaded,"** he said, **"but who is this of whom I hear such things? And he sought to see Him"**. (**Luke 9: 9**) When the Pharisees brought to Jesus the news that this Herod wanted to kill Him, Jesus called him **"that fox"**. (**Luke 13: 31-32**)

You will read of two other Herods in the book of Acts: Herod Agrippa 1st, in **Acts 12: 1** and Herod Agrippa 2nd in **Acts 25: 13**. With this background in mind, we can study the encounter of our passage.

#### Herod longed to see Jesus.

It seemed an odd twist of circumstances, which brought Jesus to him. Herod's motive was cheap curiosity: he was curious regarding the miraculous power of Christ. The effort of Pilate to get rid of the responsibility of judging the Lord Jesus brought him the opportunity. Can you picture the scene? The Lord was most likely very weary by now. He had endured the mockery and brutality of the trial before the High Priest. Now, degraded and shamed He was brought to Herod for another session of debasement. Notice that before the High Priest, before Pilate, and also

before Herod, Jesus was falsely accused, and was thus the subject of total injustice. We are told in **verse 9** that Herod questioned Him about many things, but Jesus spoke not one word. **"He (Jesus) answered him nothing."**

**The Lord Jesus had nothing to say to Herod.**

Perhaps He could have condemned him for his sinful life and have done this before the crowd. Herod certainly deserved the judgement of God upon his life. He was guilty of the blood of John the Baptist, and the Lord Jesus loved John tremendously. Would a word of condemnation have been effective? Evidently not! We have seen, from **John 8** that silence did not mean that Jesus approved of what was done. The silence of Jesus here is more telling than if He had spoken to Herod. Let us learn this about the world today: because God doesn't speak openly when men are wicked, it does not mean that He overlooks their wickedness. Someone has spoken about the 'silence of God' as the greatest mystery of the Universe. This could well be true. One day, very soon, God will speak loudly in judgement. Today, in His love, He wants men to be saved.

**The Lord Jesus had nothing to say to Herod because He will never satisfy idle curiosity.**

Herod wanted signs; he was not interested in the Saviour, and he proved it. In each of the interviews we have studied, we are bound to notice that Jesus knew the deepest secrets of each heart and mind. Nothing of Herod's motives escaped Him, therefore He said nothing. Remember that the Lord Jesus will only reveal Himself to those who are sincere and pure in their motives. This is true of any approach to God, as **Hebrews 11: 6** tells us.

**Lastly, the Lord Jesus had nothing to say to Herod because He was surrendering Himself to all that men were to do to Him.**

We can follow the Lord Jesus from His arrest in the Garden until men nailed Him to the Cross, and we shall not find that He resisted once. He had the power to shatter Herod's opposition and absolutely blot him and his men out. Instead, He was silent. **1 Peter 2: 22-24** tells us that **"when He was reviled He did not revile in return."** Somehow this encounter was not so much Jesus before Herod, but Herod before Jesus. Silence said more than any number of words could have done.

**Herod will meet the Lord Jesus again one day.**

The encounter will not this time be of Herod's choosing, but God's. In that day, Herod will be the silent one. The Lord Jesus will speak in judgment. How sad that Herod failed to put a right value upon the person of Christ in his day. Compare **Acts 17: 30-31** and **Revelation 20: 11-15**.

# Questions

## STUDY 1 IN THE TEMPLE - A WOMAN

1. What lesson can we learn from the way in which the Lord Jesus spent the early part of the day before He went to the Temple?
2. Why did the Pharisees leave instead of throwing stones at the woman?
3. What does this story teach us about our attitude to other people?
4. Why was it that the Lord Jesus did not condemn this woman?
5. What effect should the knowledge that we can have forgiveness of our sins have upon the life we live?

## STUDY 2 A MOTHER AND HER SONS

1. What attitude did the Lord Jesus take in dealing with these people?
2. How would you describe the sin that these people committed as they came to Jesus?
3. In what way did the Lord Jesus reach the place of power that He holds today?
4. In what does the idea of true greatness lie - according to the teaching of the Lord Jesus?
5. What have you learned from our study of this incident?

## STUDY 3 ON THE MOUNTAIN - MEN OUT OF THE PAST

1. What do you understand by the word 'transfigured'?
2. What did Moses and Elijah represent as far as the nation of Israel was concerned?
3. What did Moses, Elijah and Jesus talk about on the mountain?
4. What do you understand from the statement: "The Lord Jesus is God's final word to men"?
5. Of what was the transfiguration a foretaste?

## STUDY 4 HEROD - 'THAT FOX'

1. How was it that Jesus was brought to Herod?
2. What must the attitude be of all those who come to the Lord Jesus?
3. Why is God apparently silent today, even though there is so much wickedness in the world?
4. Give in your own words two reasons why you think Jesus had nothing to say to Herod.
5. What will happen at the Great White Throne of Judgement? (**Revelation 20: 11-15**)