

Jesus at Lazarus' Estate Near Thirza and at His Home in Bethania

Jesus, taking the road travelled by the Holy Family on the occasion of their flight into Egypt, arrived with His disciples at the little place not far from Legio where the Holy Family had put up and where lived a set of despised people like slaves. Jesus bought some bread here, and as He divided it, it was multiplied in His hands; but the miracle created no excitement, since He did not tarry long and performed it, as it were, in passing.

Proceeding on His journey, He was met by Lazarus, John Marc, and Obed, who had come for that purpose. With them Jesus went on to Lazarus' villa near Thirza, about five hours distant. They arrived unnoticed and by night, and found all things ready for their reception. The villa was on a mountain toward Samaria, not far from Jacob's field. A very old Jew, who went barefoot and girt, was the steward, an office he had held even when Mary and Joseph stopped here on their journey to Bethlehem. It was at this same villa that Martha and Magdalen, in Jesus' last year when He was teaching in Samaria, showed Him hospitality and implored Him to come to their brother Lazarus who was sick.

Near that estate of Lazarus was the then small city of Thirza, situated in a lovely region about seven hours' journey from Samaria. The morning sun, to which Thirza was exposed, rendered it extremely fruitful in grain, wine, and orchard fruits. The inhabitants were engaged chiefly in agriculture, the products of which they carried to a distance for sale. The city was once large and handsome and the residence of kings, but the palace had been consumed by fire and the city ruined by war. One king, Amri, had made that property of Lazarus his home until the building of Samaria, whither he then removed. The people of Thirza were in Jesus' time very pious and lived very retired in their little, isolated city. I think there are some remains of it even in our own day. The inhabitants were very reserved in their intercourse with the Samaritans. (16:24). Jesus taught in the synagogue of Thirza, but performed no cures.

On the Sabbath began the Feast of the Dedication of the Temple of Zorobabel. It was not so solemn as the dedication feast of the Machabees,



though in the houses, in the streets, out in the fields among the shepherds, and in the synagogue there were numbers of lights and fires. Jesus spent the greater part of the day in the synagogue with all the disciples. His meals were taken at Lazarus', but He ate sparingly. The greatest portion of the food was distributed to the poor of Thirza, of whom there were large numbers. Such distributions were constantly made during His stay. The city still possessed, in ancient walls and towers, some remains of its former greatness. It is probable that the house of Lazarus, which was now fifteen minutes from the city, was formerly comprised within its limits, for the gardens were interspersed with all kinds of ruined walls and foundations. Lazarus inherited this property from his father. Here as elsewhere, he was held in great honor and esteem as a very wealthy and pious, yes, a very enlightened man. His deportment rendered him very distinguished from other men. He was remarkably grave and spoke very little, but that little with great mildness and to the point.

When the feast was over, Jesus left Thirza with Lazarus and the disciples, and proceeded on His journey to Judea. The direction was that taken by Mary and Joseph when going to Bethlehem, though the road was not exactly the same, but it ran through the same region, through the mountains near Samaria. I saw them climbing a high mountain on a night that was lovely, mild and clear, a beneficent dew bathing the whole region. There were about eighteen companions with Jesus, and they walked two and two, some before Him, some behind Him, and some at His side. When the breadth of the road permitted, Jesus often stood still to instruct them and to pray. A great part of the night was spent on this journey. Toward morning they rested and took a light repast, after which carefully shunning the cities and towns, they continued their way over a mountain on which the air blew keen and cold. Not far from Samaria, I saw Jesus going along with about six of His disciples. A young man from the city cast himself down on the road before Him, saying: "Saviour of men, Thou that art to free Judea and restore to her her former glory," etc. Thinking that Christ was about to found an earthly kingdom, he begged to be received into the number of His followers in the hope of being appointed to some post of distinction. He was an orphan, but had inherited large possessions from his father, and he held some kind of an office in Samaria. Jesus treated him very graciously. He told him that on his return He would say whether He would receive him or not, that He was pleased with his good will and humility, and that He had nothing to say against what he alleged, etc. But I saw that Jesus knew how greatly the young man was attached to his riches and that, wishing to give him a lesson, He would not vouchsafe him an answer until after He had chosen the Apostles. The young

man came once more to Jesus and that second visit is recorded in the Gospel. In the evening before the Sabbath began, I saw them arrive at the shepherd inn between the two deserts, about four or five hours from Bethania. Mary and the holy women stayed there overnight when they went to Bethania, to see Jesus before the Baptism. The shepherds from the country around gathered together bringing gifts and other necessaries. The inn was transformed into an oratory, a lamp was lighted, and there they remained. Jesus taught here and celebrated the Sabbath. While travelling on this mountainous and lonely road, He stopped likewise at the place where Mary on her journey to Bethlehem had suffered so from the cold and where afterward she had been miraculously warmed. Jesus and His disciples spent the whole of the Sabbath among these shepherds, who were so happy to have Him and so deeply moved by His presence. Even Jesus Himself appeared brighter among these simple, innocent people. After the Sabbath He went on to Bethania four hours distant.