

Jesus in Mageddo. John's Disciples

When Jesus was leaving Naim, Maroni, her boy and her domestics, all the cured, and many good people of the city accompanied Him, singing Psalms and bearing green branches before Him. He went with the disciples westward along the north bank of the Cison. The mountain that shut in the valley of Nazareth lay to the right. Toward evening He and the disciples arrived at the environs of Mageddo, which stood on



the mountain chain whose eastern declivity leads down into the valley of Zabulon. Here He entered an inn, and soon afterward gave an instruction in front of it. When the laborers in the fields saw Jesus and His followers drawing near, they threw on the garments which at their work they had laid aside.

Mageddo stood on an eminence and was partly fallen to decay. In the very heart of the city there were ruins entirely overgrown with moss, while here and there arose a dilapidated arch. They must have belonged to a castle of the kings of Canaan.¹ I heard that Abraham also once sojourned in this region. The suburb in which Jesus put up was more modern and more full of life than the city itself. It consisted of a long row of houses at the base of the mountain, over which ran a great commercial highway from Ptolomais. There were numerous large inns in the neighborhood, and many publicans dwelt here. They had heard Jesus' teaching and had resolved to receive penance and Baptism. The Pharisees of the place were scandalized at these things. A great crowd of sick were already gathered and others were constantly coming. Jesus sent word to them by the disciples that He would go to them toward evening, and He directed how they should be arranged, which directions the disciples fulfilled. Outside the city of Mageddo was a large meadow surrounded by walls and porches wherein the sick were brought and laid in order.

Meanwhile Jesus, with the disciples, went through the fields outside the city instructing in parables the laborers there engaged in sowing. Some of the disciples taught those at a greater distance until Jesus came up; then they turned back to those that Jesus had already instructed, explained to them whatever they had not clearly understood, and told them about the Lord's miracles. Jesus and the disciples always taught the same things to the different sets of workmen, so that on comparing notes, they all found that they had heard the same. They who had understood better, could afterward explain to the others. They often discontinued their work in this hot country to rest, and it was of these intermissions, and the opportunity afforded by the time devoted to meals, that Jesus took advantage to teach.

While Jesus was thus traversing the fields with the disciples, four of John's followers arrived. They saluted the disciples and paid attention to their instructions. They had strips of fur around their necks, and leathern thongs bound their waists. They had not been sent by John, although they had constant intercourse with him and his disciples. They were degenerate followers of John, sworn to the Herodians, who had sent them to follow Jesus and hear what He taught concerning His Kingdom. They were more austere, though at the same time more polished in their manners, than Jesus' disciples. Some hours after, another troop of John's disciples made their appearance. They were twelve in number, only two of whom had been sent by John; the rest had come through curiosity. As they approached, Jesus was returning to the city, and they followed Him. Some of them had been present at the last miracles wrought by Jesus, and had hastened back to tell John what they had seen. When Jesus raised the youth of Naim, some of them were present, and they hurried off to Machaerus to inform John.

They said to him: "What is it? What must we think? We have seen Him perform such and such miracles! We have heard such and such words from His lips! But His disciples are much less strict than we in the observance of the Law. Whom shall we follow? Who is Jesus? Why does He cure all that appeal to Him? Why does He console and help strangers, though He does not take a step toward freeing you?" John always had trouble with his disciples, for they would not separate from him. It was for that reason that he sent them so often to Jesus, that they might learn to know Him and eventually follow Him. But they were so prejudiced in favor of John that what they saw

and heard made little impression upon them. It was his desire that his disciples should follow Jesus that led John to urge Him so frequently to manifest Himself; he hoped that his followers would yield to the movement that converted the other Jews. He thought that, seeing them come again and again with their doubts, Jesus would be, as it were, necessitated to proclaim aloud that He was the Messiah, the Son of God; therefore it was that he sent those two with their usual questions to Him.

On entering the city with His disciples, Jesus went to the circular enclosure where the sick from the whole country around were encamped. Among them were some from Nazareth who knew Him. The lame, the blind, the dumb, the deaf, the sick of all kinds were here gathered, also several possessed. Making a turn around the circle, Jesus cured the last named, many of whom were suffering from different degrees of possession. They were indeed not so violent as such poor creatures had been at other times, but they were afflicted with convulsions and their limbs were distorted. Jesus cured them with a word of command uttered as He passed and at some distance. A dark vapor issued from them, they became somewhat faint and, when returned to full consciousness, they were quite changed. The vapors, on first issuing from their bodies, appeared quite subtle; but they soon condensed and united. Sometimes they sank into the earth, or again rose in the air; on this occasion they followed the former course. The evil spirit often departs like a dark shadow in human form. Instead of vanishing immediately, I have seen him wandering around among the bystanders before disappearing.

Jesus had scarcely begun to cure when John's disciples, with a certain air of importance—as if the bearers of a commission—stepped up to Him and gave signs of their desire to address Him. Jesus, however, paid no attention to them, but went on with the cures. Such treatment was greatly displeasing to them, and they could not understand it. Many of John's disciples were decidedly narrow-minded and jealous. Jesus wrought miracles, John did not. John spoke so highly of Jesus, and yet Jesus made no effort to free him from confinement. Although impressed by His miracles and doctrine, yet they soon allowed themselves to be influenced again by the public voice which was asking: "Who is He? Are not His poor relatives known by everyone?" Then again, they could not understand His words relative to His Kingdom. They saw no kingdom and no preparations for one. As John had been honored by so

many and now lay proscribed in prison, they thought, among other things, that Jesus did not help him, that He allowed him to languish in captivity, in order to increase His own popularity. They were scandalized also at the liberty of His disciples. They esteemed it excessive humility in John to prize Jesus so highly and that he was constantly sending to implore Him to manifest Himself, to make an open declaration of who He was.

As Jesus always spoke evasively on that point and as they had no idea that John sent them to Him in order that they might know Him, this knowledge was to them at the time, on account of their preconceived ideas, more difficult than it might have been to the most simple child.

As Jesus was making the circuit of the enclosure curing, He came to a sick man from Nazareth who began to speak of his acquaintance with Him. "Do You remember," he said, "that You lost Your grandfather when You were twenty-five years old? We were often together in those days." The man referred to the death of St. Anne's second or third husband. Jesus did not pause for many words. He answered merely: "Yes, yes, I remember," and turned at once to the man's sins and sufferings. When He found him penitent and believing, He cured him, addressed to him some words of admonition, and passed on to the next invalid.

When Jesus reached the opposite side of the enclosure, the disciples sent by John confronted Him. They had, from their stand in the center, watched with amazement the miracles wrought. They now addressed Him in these words: "John the Baptist has sent us to Thee to ask art Thou He who is to come or look we for another?" Jesus answered: "Go and relate to John what you have heard and seen. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, widows are consoled, the poor have the Gospel preached to them. What is crooked is made straight. And blessed is he that shall not be scandalized in Me." After these words Jesus turned away, and John's disciples took their departure.

Jesus could not speak more plainly of Himself, for who would have understood Him? His disciples were good, simple-hearted, generous, and pious souls, but as yet quite incapable of comprehending such a mystery. Many of them were related to Him by ties of blood, consequently they would have been scandalized at more precise language on Jesus' part, or would

have conceived erroneous ideas of Him. As for the multitude at large, they were altogether unprepared for such a truth, and besides, He was encompassed by spies. Even among John's disciples, the Pharisees and Herodians had their creatures.

When John's messengers had departed, Jesus began to teach. The cured, crowds of people, the Scribes of the place, His disciples, and the five publicans that dwelt here, formed the audience. The instruction was continued by the light of flambeaux, and the remaining sick were afterward cured. Jesus took for the subject of His discourse His own reply to John's disciples. He spoke of how they should use the benefits received from God, and exhorted to penance and a change of life. As He knew that some of the Pharisees present had taken occasion, from the brevity of His reply to John's messengers, to say to the people that He, Jesus, made little account of John and was willing enough to see him ruined in public estimation that He Himself might be exalted, He explained the answer He had given as well as what He had said on the score of penance. He also recalled to them what they themselves had heard John say of Him. Why, He asked, were they always doubting? What did they expect from John? He said: "What went ye out to see when ye went to John? Did ye go to see a reed shaken in the wind? Or a man effeminately and magnificently clothed? Listen! They that are clothed sumptuously and who live delicately are in the palaces of kings. But what did ye desire to see when ye went in quest of him? Was it to see a Prophet?

Yea, I tell ye, ye saw more than a Prophet when ye saw him. This is he of whom it is written: Amen, I say to you there hath not risen among them that are born of women a greater Prophet than John the Baptist, and yet he that is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied of it until John; and if ye will receive it, he is Elias that is to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear!" All present were very much impressed by Jesus' words, and wanted to receive Baptism. The Scribes alone murmured. They were especially scandalized at Jesus because He accepted hospitality from the publicans, who also were present at this instruction. Jesus therefore profited by this opportunity to speak of all the reports they had set afloat concerning

both John and Himself, particularly of the reproach made against Him of frequenting the company of publicans and sinners.

After that Jesus entered the house of one of the publicans, where He found the other four, and there He taught. Among His hearers on this occasion were some that had determined to amend their lives and to receive Baptism. This house was near the enclosure wherein Jesus had just cured the sick. There was another publican's house at the entrance of the city, and still some others beyond. Debbaseth, where Bartholomew resided, could be seen from the road when first starting from Naim to Mageddo, but on a nearer approach the heights of the latter place concealed it from view. It was situated about an hour and a half to the west on the Cison, at the entrance of the valley of Zabulon.