

THE ROAD TO NAZARETH

Not long ago I was driving down the interstate and I saw a young man standing on the side of the road. He wasn't very impressive in appearance and seemed to have all his worldly possessions in two bags. As I went by he held up a sign with one word on it: "HOME." I wanted to stop and help him get home but I had a car load and because of the way things are today, even if I would have had room, I don't think I would stop and pickup a stranger. But since then I have often wondered where home was, and if he got there and what happened when he arrived.

Immediately after his baptism and his time in the wilderness the first thing Jesus did was to head for home, the town of Nazareth. Oh, you remember Nazareth. It was a two-bit kind of town. It was a town no one really thought much of. It was a town where you would not really want to live. And people often said, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Jesus did. He came out of Nazareth and now he is on his way back, headed back there at the beginning of his ministry.

I wonder if those people of Nazareth knew him when he got there. I wonder if they ever really knew him. Who is this Jesus? We have been asking that question, of course for 2000 years. We have come up with many good answers, though I suspect that all the answers are less than he is. The sum of all the parts is less than Jesus. Who is he?

Is he the Christ of dogma, the Christ of our creeds? Surely those statements tell us who he is. And yet, he is more than the telling and reciting of them. Is he the Christ of the theologically minded, who down through 2,000 years have sought to explain him and have used all their best thinking? Is he the Christ of Saint Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Karl Barth, and Paul Tillich? Is he the Jesus of history, sought after by those 19th century theologians who knew they could take all the information in the New Testament, put it together, search out the evidence and come up with a complete biography of Jesus? Is he the one they searched for, only to be challenged by Albert Schweitzer's book, "The Quest of the Historical Jesus", which said we cannot find out all the details of his life?

Is he the Christ of literature, art and music whose life more than any other person in history has captured the minds of writers, artists and musicians? Is he the Jesus of revolutionaries, who in every part of the world have found him in their inspiration to create a new order of things? Is he the Christ of heresies, as old as the church itself, which we still have with us today and which say he is either only a man and nothing more, or completely God and nothing less?

Who is this Jesus? One thing for sure and for certain, he still remains. Even though he has been scandalized, theologized, apologized, scrutinized, and theorized, he still remains. Even though there

has been cultural upheaval, political revolution, social evolution and moral pollution, he still remains. Who is this Jesus? "Is not this Joseph's son?" That was the question they asked that day when he went back home to Nazareth and stood up in church with all the people in his home synagogue and read from the book of Isaiah: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

Then he looked at all the home-folks, those with whom he had been raised and he said to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." How proud they were of him at first. They spoke well of him and wondered at those gracious words, "Is not this Joseph's son? We know him. What a fine young man." But Jesus knew the people of his home. And he said, "Doubtless, you will quote to me this proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself.' Truly, I say to you no prophet is acceptable in his own country."

After Jesus had spoken, the home-folks took Jesus out to the edge of town and were going to throw him off the side of a hill because they really did not know who he was. Who is this Jesus? That is life's ultimate question. Upon the answer rests the answers to all of our questions about the meaning of life. Let me give you some answers which are so simple, yet they contain the most profound truths.

FIRST, HE COMES TO US AS ONE OF US. THAT IS WHO HE IS. He is the one who comes to us as one of us. When Jesus went back to Nazareth he was one of them, a Nazareth boy. They knew him as one of them. God sent him to be that. He is God's son, and in a way we can never adequately explain he is God's son in human flesh-the God-Man... who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be held onto, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men." That was the way Paul put it. He emptied himself of that which was divine and became one of us.

In doing this, he identified himself with all of us. He took upon himself all the pain, sorrow, sin and heartache of those he walked among. He even chose a road that led to death by crucifixion- the ultimate identification with us. In doing this, he comes to us as one of us and takes upon himself all our pain, sorrow, sin and heartache.

I read somewhere about a young man in college who, for one quarter, had to spend a few hours a week in a nursing home. His first day he confessed to his supervisor he did not know what to say. The supervisor said, "Good, you see that lady over there. Go over and say hello." He walked over

and said, "Hello." She asked, "Are you a relative?" He answered, "No." she said, "Good! I hate my relatives! Sit down!" Jesus is a relative of ours who has come to us- Son of God and our brother- who makes us become the children of God. He comes to us as one of us.

SECONDLY, HE COMES TO US WHERE WE ARE. THAT IS ALSO WHO HE IS. He is the one who comes to us where we are. He went home to his own people first and met them where they were. He knew where they were. And he knew also that "No prophet is acceptable in his own country." But he went to them anyway.

You see this throughout the New Testament accounts of his life. Wherever people were, that is where he went. He went to a wedding feast, and out around the lake, and up on the side of a hill, and along a dusty road, in the middle of town, and into all those homes, wherever there were people who had troubles, problems, pains. Sins, and sorrows, he went to them.

Because he met them where they were he had a way of putting them at ease. Sometime people are really uncomfortable around preachers and they have this overwhelming compulsion to demonstrate their ignorance of the Bible. Once on the T.V. show "The Jeffersons" the preacher came to see George. In response to some statement made by the preacher George said, "Well, it's like the Bible says, it is easier for a needle to get into heaven than it is for a rich man to get in a camel's eye." But no one was very uptight around Jesus. He put them at ease where they were and because of that he was able to call out the best from them. And he can and will call out the best from within you. He comes to us where we are.

FINALLY, HE COMES TO US AND CALLS US TO GO WITH HIM. THAT IS ALSO WHO HE IS. He is the one who calls us to go with him. Jesus left Nazareth and went on the road. No one from Nazareth went with him. He called no disciples from Nazareth and no one volunteered. But he does call us to go with him, and out on other roads. For whoever we are and whatever we are, he does not says to us as he said to those fishermen by the lake so long ago, "Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men."

A preacher was working on two sermons for the coming Sunday. Since it was June, one had to do with a graduation theme and for Sunday he had something else in mind. Late Friday evening he received a phone call from a nearby all girls college asking him to be the graduation speaker because at the last minute the original speaker had suddenly taken ill. He said he would and asked his wife to put his sermon in his Bible and give it to him as he went out the door. He arrived a few minutes late, just in time to speak. He walked to the podium, opened his Bible and read out the first line-not

knowing his wife had picked up the wrong sermon- "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." That was good news for those girls.

But the good news for us is that Jesus calls us to come and go with him, to follow him, to become servants, fishers and followers, witnesses, and to become more than we are.

So, who is this Jesus? He is the one who comes to us and calls us to go with him-to walk with him. Unless you come to grips with who this Jesus is you will never know who you are, and what your life is all about.