

I AM JULIUS...
A CENTURION OF ROME

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Laus Deo

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TOO BLIND TO SEE

The journey to Jerusalem indeed was long. The lack of water resources along the way didn't help. Simo never complained and Julius only complained to himself. When they arrived in Samaria they spent a night in an inn to rest their weary bones. The taste of better food was also a treat. Simo was their cook but he admitted he was a better tent maker than a cook.

The next day their journey to Jerusalem resumed. They were rested, fed, and quite ready to travel. Simo gathered information about their visit to Jerusalem. He found a Samaritan man he knew years ago. Julius had long since become grateful for Simo accompanying him on their journeys.

When they were about a day and a half outside of Jerusalem they found some people trying to repair their tent. Simo was able to help them by patching their tent damaged by a sudden storm. It was a good opportunity for Julius and Simo to eat better food than dried fish and old bread. The women of the group were so appreciative of Simo's work that they cleaned the men's spare clothing. When they got to Jerusalem Julius looked for the synagogue where Jesus healed the blind man.

"Pardon friend, can you spare a moment?" Julius asked the man walking right past them.

"What do you want, stranger?" the man replied in a gruff voice.

Julius held out his hand in greeting but the man would not accept it. He clung to his robe with both hands. Julius had seen this type before when he was a Centurion. Pharisees. Legalistic rabbis laying burdens of guilt upon the Jewish people they couldn't bear. They created spiritual laws no one on earth could obey.

"We're looking for a man who lives around here. He used to be blind from what I understand but he can see now. Do you know of the man?"

“I have no time for such trivial matters, I must go to synagogue.”

The man gave the two of them a look like they were sheep standing too close to him.

“Seems the rabbi doesn’t wish to speak to us dirty travelers. Hey, Julius?”

“You’re so right, Simo. To think that a rude man like him claims to represent God.”

“Shalom,” said a voice behind them.

Julius and Simo turned towards a man coming out from under an awning covering a vegetable stand.

“Don’t mind him,” he said as he shook Julius’ hand and then Simo’s.

“These Pharisees think the sun rises and falls upon them. Seems a day doesn’t go by that a new law is passed down from God. According to the Pharisees that is. Welcome to Jerusalem, my name is Omar. Come, come to my stand. We can talk better out of this hot sun.”

Omar’s teenage son brought some water to the table for Julius and Simo. One of his other sons took their donkey around back to water it. Meanwhile Omar cut up some vegetables and the three of them talked for a while. Omar told them the Pharisees did not approve of Jesus healing the blind man.

“Just because the healing took place on the Sabbath. Or jealousy on the part of the Pharisees. Jesus was a popular man around these parts. I have nothing bad to say about Him. Even though I am a descendant of Ishmael Jesus was kind to me,” he said.

Oh yes, there was quite a stir that came from Jesus healing the man on their Sabbath. They even brought the man’s parents into the synagogue. They questioned them like they were common criminals. The Pharisees wanted to know whether the man was blind all these years.”

“Really. Did the parents tell them the man was born blind?” Julius asked.

“Well, I wasn’t there since I’m not a Jew. Others were there who told me the man was born blind according to his parents. The rest of us who live around here already knew he was blind. The poor fellow couldn’t even get around by himself. A couple of years ago a man who works with wood made the blind man a stick to help him find his way around. But even that had its limitations. The Pharisees questioned the parents in anger and you know how persistent they are.”

“How’s that, Omar? You’re talking about the parents or the Pharisees?”

“Julius, you were a Centurion. Didn’t you tell me that earlier? Yeah, you know them. These Pharisees think they’re God almighty instead of servants of God. Look at me, they won’t buy anything me. Why? I’m an Arab! These Pharisees, they threaten people with expulsion from synagogue. If they don’t do as they’re told they get thrown out. This blind man’s parents didn’t want to be thrown out of synagogue. You should go and speak to them, Julius.”

“Speak to who? The Pharisees or the parents?” Julius asked.

“Who? Why, the parents of course,” Omar said.

“You know them?” Julius asked.

“Maybe a little. Sometimes the old man will come and buy things from me. They live around the corner from synagogue. Don’t know his woman’s name but the old man’s name is Jacob.”

Julius paid for the food and water he, Simo, and their donkey ate. After that he thanked Omar for his help. They were soon on their way to the synagogue to see if they could find this Jacob fellow’s house. An elderly man was walking in their direction as they approached the synagogue. Julius stopped and struck up a conversation with him.

“Shalom, my friend.”

“May God’s peace also be upon you, travelers.”

“I’m called Julius and this is my friend Simo. My friend, do you know of a man who lives around here who goes by the name of Jacob?”

“Several men living in this area go by that name. Why do you seek him? Are you family? Friends? Why does a Centurion seek Jacob?”

“What just what is it that makes you think I’m a Centurion?” Julius asked. He’d encountered these militants even while he was still in the Roman Army. Men, and women, who didn’t fear Centurions. Or Caesar for that matter. Benjamites. Fierce warriors, they feared no one. Not even the other Hebrew tribes.

“Relax, I’m an old man. Your build, the scars, and that ring on your hand. Now, about this man Jacob,” the old man asked with a toothless grin.

“It’s unfortunately for us we are neither. But we do hope to become friends with him and his wife. We don’t know what her name is. We understand they had a son born blind...”

“Oh... that Jacob. Yes, yes, yes. He lives just beyond the steps to synagogue. Look for the house beyond synagogue with the chicken coop in the side yard. By the way, Jacob sells good eggs if you’re interested. The very best.” he said as he held out his left hand to Julius. Julius understood the significance of the left hand and offered up his left hand in return.

After they bid farewell to the man Julius wondered what he meant by that Jacob as if the man was a criminal. Simo spotted the chicken coop in the side yard of a small house just beyond the local synagogue. Just as the man had told them. To their delight a man was working out in the chicken coop, feeding the squawking flock of hens.

“Hello in the house,” Julius said loud enough for the man to hear him over the hens.

“Shalom, friend! One moment and I will speak with you. Come inside my yard, come and sit while I finish feeding my birds. Feel free to the water for you and your animal as well.”

In a few minutes the man was standing next to them. After washing his hands he wished them a warm welcome to his house.

“What brings you tired travelers to my home today?” Jacob asked as he took a long drink from the water cup hanging at the well.

“We seek a son of yours who we understand was once blind...”

“What do you want with Milcah? Is he in some sort of trouble? Is he ill? Please tell me any news you have of my son.”

“I’m sorry Jacob, but we don’t have any news for you. In fact, we don’t even know Milcah. We were hoping to speak with him about his blindness and how he was healed.”

“You’ll find Milcah down at the threshing floor where he works. Please be kind to him. There are many who aren’t and it has made him unhappy. And bitter. He doesn’t come around here much since my wife and I became such a disappointment to him.”

“How could you and your wife have disappointed him?”

“Well, we are his parents so we should know about him being born blind. Yet there are some around these parts who doubt our word about it. There was a man from Galilee who came to synagogue on the Sabbath. He healed our Milcah then and there. We did not see the healing take place but he does have his sight back. We became a disappointment when the Pharisees asked us about his sight.”

“Why did they want to know?” Julius asked.

“They felt, and even now they feel, as if Milcah could see all along. That we, and he, faked being blind so people would feel sorry for us and give money to Milcah. They threatened us, and him, saying they would put us out of synagogue because of the man who healed Milcah.”

“But I still don’t see how Milcah would be disappointed in you and your wife,” said Julius.

The old man smote his chest three times and tears welled up in his eyes. His voice cracked as he explained what happened.

“May God have mercy on us. We abandoned our son just so we could stay in synagogue. When the Pharisees kept pressing us about the

boy's eyesight we told them that he's of age so ask him about it. You see, we didn't remain faithful to our son."

"I think I'm beginning to see," said Julius.

"No, I don't think you do see since neither of you are Hebrew. Do you know what it's like to be put out of synagogue? People, your neighbors, even your family will no longer speak to you. In public or in private. Even if my wife and I could afford to move to where there's another synagogue the rabbis there would soon know. Bad news travels fast in these parts, my friend."

"I understand, Jacob. Thanks for your kindness and the information about Milcah. If you don't mind, my friend Simo and I will go and talk to him."

At the doorway of his simple home Jacob wiped a tear from his eye before saying farewell to his visitors.

"Shalom, my friends. And please... tell my son we miss him very much. Tell him... never mind – he will not listen to any news about his parents."

Jacob turned and walked back into his simple home leaving Julius and Simo standing in the path.

"Well Simo, what do you say we locate Milcah and see what it was like to be blind? And then to be healed?"

"I'm excited, Julius. Meeting someone healed by Jesus is exciting to me. How about you?"

"More than just excited. It'll be an honor to meet someone Jesus healed."

It took them but a short time to find the threshing floor. Simo took their donkey for some water and tied it up while Julius tried to locate Milcah. The threshing floor was on a large flat rock where they used animals to pull threshing sledges around it. The workers came up behind the animals gathering up whatever was threshed that day. It was a hot, tiring job for men and animals alike.

Simo came back from watering the donkey and found Julius talking to a man standing outside the threshing floor. He appeared to be the man in charge of the workers on the floor.

“You can have only a few minutes to speak with Milcah. He has much work to do. Hey Milcah! Milcah! Over here. Come and talk with these men.”

Julius introduced himself and Simo to Milcah as Simo handed a waterskin to Milcah. Milcah never said anything about himself. He just listened while Julius explained how the two of them wanted to meet people Jesus healed.

“By listening to these Pharisees you’ll have a hard time understanding the whole affair. They wondered if I faked being blind all those years. Can you imagine? Here I was faking blindness for over twenty years. Who would fake something like blindness for that long? No man could pretend to be blind from birth without someone unveiling the deception. Who in their right mind would want to sit outside synagogue and beg for a few coins each day?”

“I know I couldn’t do it,” Julius replied. “Would you mind telling us what it was like when Jesus healed you?”

“What was it like? Like nothing I’d ever experienced before, I can honestly tell you that. The synagogue was where I did most of my begging. I waited for all the good people coming out of synagogue. I hoped someone would have enough goodness in their hearts to toss a few coins to me. Some did but many did not. They didn’t realize how good my hearing was and that I could hear them shuffling past me. I might well have been the blind man but they were the ones who could not see the beggar right in front of them.

This one day I heard a crowd near the synagogue. Soon enough I heard a man’s voice asking ‘Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?’ Little did I know that they were talking about me.

The voice I hear was right in front of where I sat. I didn't hear much after that. One of those standing around said something about the man spitting on the ground. One man, I don't know who it was, helped me stand up and told me he wanted to do something to help my eyes.

"He put something sticky on both of my eyes. When he did I felt the oddest sensation in my eyes. Not a burning or itching, a tingling if you will."

"What did it feel like?" Julius was beside himself with anticipation of hearing the story about Jesus.

"There was pain. I felt pain in my eyes for the first time in my life. No... it wasn't real pain but maybe a pressure on my eyes. This man told me I should go and wash my eyes in the pool of Siloam. I did as he said. Someone handed me a cloth to dry my face and I saw the cloth I was holding in my hands. My brothers, I could see! For the first time in my life I could see! It was a simple tan cloth but it was the first thing I saw."

"Were you happy then?" Simo asked after he drank from the wineskin.

"Happy? I was the happiest I'd ever been. But it was short lived. While everyone else was praising God for my healing the Pharisees started questioning me. They wanted to know about the man who healed me. They were quite upset because he healed me on the Sabbath. They accused him of being a sinner but I don't understand how a sinner could have healed me.

They were even angrier when told they I didn't know whether my healer was a sinner or not. I told them I was once blind but now could see. Seems they didn't believe me. Even after watching me beg outside the synagogue all those years.

They kept asking me the same questions over and over. I knew they were trying to trick me into saying something that wasn't true. I asked them if they wanted to hear the story again because they wanted to become Jesus' disciples as well. There were a few more words tossed back

and forth but it only made the Pharisees angrier. That's when they put me out of the synagogue. So be it, I'm Hebrew by race, a follower of Jesus by grace."

"I'm sorry to hear about that, Milcah. Do you miss it?" Julius asked.

"Not in the least. I'm a Hebrew by race only so there's no problem with me not going to their synagogue anymore."

"If you're not a Hebrew anymore then..."

"Julius, I believe with all my heart the man who healed me is the Son of God. Jesus is the one I worship now. He came to me after the Pharisees put me out of synagogue and told me he is the Son of God. And I believe him. Who else could do such a miracle like giving a blind man his sight?"

"But your mother and father, Milcah. What of them?" Simo asked.

"My father is a lot like the others. He makes out like I am the one with a spiritual problem when it's actually the two of them who have a spiritual problem. Just like the Pharisees, they refuse to accept Jesus as the Son of God.

As long as they feel that way they'll shun me and the rest of us who worship Jesus. You know brothers, it was me who was born blind. I spent over twenty years of my life as a blind beggar. Nothing is worse than being blind. But there is one thing worse than not having eyesight. And that is being too blind to see the spiritual things around us."

The three of them praised God for the miracle Jesus had worked on Milcah. After they shared the waterskin one more time Milcah asked Julius where he and Simo were off to next. Julius replied they didn't have anywhere special in mind.

"Would you know of another miracle worked by Jesus?" he asked.

"You know brothers, there is a tale of Jesus healing a man who was dead. Not sick mind you, dead. D-E-A-D. The man lay in his tomb for three, maybe four days and Jesus gave him life once more. The location is

Nain if I'm not mistaken. Up there is where the dead were made to walk again. Maybe that should be the next journey you brothers should take.”

After they all prayed for a safe journey for Julius and Simo, Milcah went back to his work on the threshing floor. Julius and Simo loaded up their donkey with supplies and headed off towards Nain. Neither of them could but wonder at the power that Jesus must have possessed. Giving a blind man his sight back was a true miracle in itself. But to bring a man back from death?

WRITING FOR AN AUDIENCE OF ONE

About the author:

Floyd Larck lives in Bushnell Florida with his wife Debbie, their lovebird named Peaches and a cockatiel named P.J. and several chickens. Floyd is an amateur radio operator and has been writing for six years as of the writing of this book you have just read.

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