The confession by Peter of the Christ's' identity at Banias and the glorious transformation of Jesus on snowy Mount Hermon (the Transfiguration) witnessed by Peter, James, John, Moses and Elijah, the long, long trek to Calvary for our Lord now began. Plodding on foot through the Jezreel Valley (Armageddon), across terraced Samaria, down the Jordan Valley rift to Jericho and up the rocky terrain of Judea's Mt. Olivet required several weeks of rigorous travel - over a hundred or so miles. Treacherous miles, too, over brutal ridges, cliffs and canyons. With every step closer, Jesus had fewer and fewer breaths to take before nails would be pounded through his extremities to a wooden cross.

Perhaps even worse to this sinless One, would be the confrontation of the cup of sin, presented to Him by His Father, demanding He drink its ghastly dregs there in the shadows of Gethsemane. Just a Thursday or so away, until that night before His crucifixion when Jesus felt stress so agonizing it oozed blood from his face, even as Temple guards came splashing across the Kidron creek to arrest Him.

Every trekking south, our Lord still had much to do, many to touch, lessons to teach, sick ones to heal and hope restored. Yes, even His followers, the disciples, had much to learn, even while one of them was conspiring in his fevered mind how to make money betraying Him.

Part of this journey is related in mid-chapters of Matthew. He was there, a witness, a hearer, and he knew it must all be written down. We are blessed that he did so faithfully.

THE LESSON OF HUMILITY

Matthew 18:1-4

At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? [2] And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, [3] And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. [4] Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

How that crass question must have grieved Jesus! Yet He patiently responded that
personal motives had no place in His Kingdom. The disciples’ devotion must be for Jesus’ sake and none other. There must be the simple, yet desperately-deep love similar to that of a child for its parent.

THE LESSON OF RESPONSIBILITY

Matthew 18:5-7

And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. [6] But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

[7] Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!

The world system might declare, “Well, if the guy gets hurt, it was his own fault!” Or, “He should have looked where he was going!” Or, “No skin off my back!” Not so, taught Jesus. Any follower of His who caused some weaker person to fall beside the way or who was a “stumbling block” would be responsible for the weaker one who fell.
Matthew 18:23-35

Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. [24] And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. [25] But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. [26] The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. [27] Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. [28] But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. [29] And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. [30] And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. [31] So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. [32] Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: [33] Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? [34] And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. [35] So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

This is one of our Lord’s best-known (and perhaps least-observed) teachings. In the prayer example Jesus gave us, we pray, “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” We forgive those who have hurt or offended us.

Many years ago, I was preaching in the Mid West and a man came to the altar for prayer. He told me another fellow had offended him in some way twenty years earlier and he hated him for it - so much that if he could get away with it he would gladly kill the man. I was shocked at his anger and asked him what that fellow had done to him. He looked at me blankly and finally replied, “I don’t remember.” The Christian’s forgiveness for others if predicated on the reality that the Christian himself or herself is a FORGIVEN PERSON.

There were other ethical laws that Jesus passed on that were NOT suggestions. This is the standard of living that our Master requires of us. There were other ethics issues that Jesus taught in that 18th chapter of Matthew. Even as Jesus made that last walk to Jerusalem, He was imparting spiritual truths to His men.
THE PARABLES OF “LOST-NESS”

What an unpleasant word – LOST! As Jesus walked with His men, He told them three stories of being lost, retold for us by Luke in his beloved 15th chapter.

1. The story of the lost sheep
2. The story of the lost coin
3. The story of the lost son

The Lost Sheep

Luke 15:3-7

And he spake this parable unto them, saying, [4] What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? [5] And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. [6] And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. [7] I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

I am told that a sheep is not the “brightest bulb in the chandelier.” This animal probably just wandered off unguided by a shepherd or a trained dog. In all likelihood it didn’t even realize it was lost.

Is that not the case with multiplied millions of human souls today? Blissfully unaware of Heaven or Hell. Unaware of their tragic “lostness.” Even as Jesus wended His way toward the place of His crucifixion, He lamented the reality of the multitudes lost and who were not even aware of it. Like a good shepherd He was trying to “bring them back into the fold.” Thankful for those safely “tucked in for the night,” the Good Shepherd would go through the treacherous canyons in search of the one lost sheep.

There were ninety and nine that safely lay in the shelter of the fold, But one was out on the hills faraway, Far off from the gates of gold... Away on the mountains wild and bare, away from the tender shepherd’s care Away from the tender shepherd’s care. “Oh thou hast here thy ninety and nine - Are they not enough for Thee?” But our shepherd made answer, “This of mine has wandered away from Me And though the road be rough and steep, I go to the desert to find my sheep! I go to the desert to find my sheep!”
None of the ransomed ever knew how deep were the waters crossed,
Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed through
Ere He found his sheep that was lost.
Out in the desert He heard a faint cry, sick and helpless and ready to die,
Sick and helpless and ready to die.

But all through the mountains, thunder-riven, and up on the rocky steep
There arose a glad cry at the gates of Heaven -
"Rejoice I have found my sheep!"
And the angels echoed around the throne, "Rejoice for the Shepherd brings back His own,
Rejoice for the Shepherd brings back His own!"

I was born after the Great Depression of the 20's and early 30's. History volumes tell the
tragic tales of people who almost overnight lost all their fortunes. How sad to lose all that
you’ve worked for all your life. It’s also sad to lose your health. Dust to dust and ashes to
ashes is an irrefutable law that is at work in all of our lives - at least to some extent or the
other. Barring the Rapture of Christ’s church, we are all bound to have health
deterioration. So it is not really the saddest thing to lose our health. Well, then, how about
the loss of life itself? James 4:14 Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow.
For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then
vanisheth away. The poet said we would one day be citizens of that city “of long streets
and narrow houses,” the cemetery. You may be asking, if these losses are not the most
tragic, what is? The most tragic loss is your soul! How tragic if one’s soul should
languish for all time and eternity, never to be with God again! That’s the greatest loss.
The lamb was lost - and didn’t know it.  But the shepherd did and searched for it until he
found that which was lost.

The Lost Coin

Luke 15:8-10

Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a
candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? [9] And when she hath
found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me;
for I have found the piece which I had lost. [10] Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in
the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

The coin was lost due to forces beyond its control.  Probably the law of gravity had slipped
the coin from lady in question and it had dropped to the floor.

It would not be difficult to lose a coin in a peasant woman’s house and it might take a
long time to find it.  The houses were very dark, for they were lit by one little window not
much more than about 18 inches across.  The floor was beaten earth, covered with dried
reeds and rushes; and to look for a coin on a floor like that was very much like looking
for a needle in a haystack.  The woman swept the floor in the hope that she might see the
coin glint or hear it clink as it moved.

It is possible that the lost coin would buy bread for the woman for the next week or so.  It
might have been the difference between hunger and adequate nourishment.  The woman
might well have searched for it with intensity because if she did not find it, her family would
not eat.

There are many forces in our day that could well tear a precious soul away from the
Master’s hand.  There are outside sources such as alcohol, drugs, family brutality, homes
torn by divorce, etc.  And there are those inner forces such as fear, loneliness, and a host of
conflicts.  One way or the other, the soul is dropped and will remain lost unless someone
searches diligently until it’s found.

The church of Christ must send its forces into all the world to “snatch as it were brands from
the burning.”  Fanny Crosby, a century ago, penned the words to the song, Rescue the
Perishing.  The third verse always moves me:

Down in the human heart, crushed by the tempter, feelings lie buried that grace can restore;
Touched by a loving heart, wakened by kindness,
Chords that are broken will vibrate once more!
Luke 15:11-32

And he said, A certain man had two sons: [12] And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. [13] And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. [14] And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. [15] And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. [16] And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. [17] And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! [18] I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, [19] And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. [20] And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. [21] And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. [22] But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: [23] And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: [24] For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. [25] Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. [26] And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. [27] And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. [28] And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. [29] And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: [30] But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. [31] And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. [32] It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

There was a whole lot more to this story than we see at first glance. According to Jewish law at that time, a father could not leave his property at his own discretion. The older son had to receive 2/3 of the inheritance and the younger sons the remaining - so in this case the younger son (only two sons apparently) would receive one-third of the estate. However, the father could dispense his holdings while still living. This particular younger son demanded his inheritance and left home. Today we almost make the hero of the story the wayward son; in truth, the hero is the loving father. This is a primary word picture of our
Pastor Betzer sits astride his old friend, Kojak the camel, overlooking Judea and the dusty road to Jerusalem. Through here this route walked Jesus and His disciples, just days from the Cross.

heavenly Father. What forgiveness! No recriminations! No “I told you so!” President Abraham Lincoln was once asked how he was going to treat the defeated southerners of the Confederacy when the war ended. He replied, “I will treat them as if they had never been away.” Is that not the way our Heavenly Father treats us because of His Son Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah?

And with every step....every word of instruction from the Master, the group of men moved yet another several feet closer to Calvary.

The Final Ascent To Jerusalem Through Jericho

Luke 18:35-43

And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging: [36] And hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant. [37] And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. [38] And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me. [39] And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me. [40] And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him, [41] Saying, What wilt thou that
The round structure in the middle of the picture is the foundation of a watch tower found in ancient Jericho, believed by some historians to be the oldest man-made building in the world. It has been dated to 10,000 years B.C. I have climbed that tower. Scary!

said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee. [43] And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.

Many historians believe that along with Damascus, Syria, Jericho was one of the very first inhabited cities in the ancient past. There are actually five locations for Jericho - all very closely situated. Present-day Jericho, just 16 miles northeast of Jerusalem, has a population of about 20,000. It is a true oasis in the desert.

I usually arrive in Jericho from the north, having been bussed down the famed Jordan River Valley rift. At the southwest corner of the city, our bus heads farther west, slanting to the south as we climb the brutally back side of the Mount of Olives. Each time we make that final turn toward the Holy City, I think of Jesus and His disciples, coming to the same junction, where the blind man cried out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

When the poor fellow first heard that Jesus was passing by, he called out for help - a loud shout for attention. Then he cried out again - this time the instinctive shout of
emotion, a scream, an almost animal cry. So Jesus - once again moved by compassion - stopped and healed the fellow.

The Little Guy In The Tree

Luke 19:1-10

And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. [2] And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich. [3] And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. [4] And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycomore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way. [5] And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house. [6] And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully. [7] And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. [8] And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. [9] And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham. [10] For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.
Going through Jericho each year, our travelers always ask, “Where’s a sycomore tree?”

Well, as far as we know, there is just one left in the town and it’s very protected. I always take our people by it to take a look. You will find a picture of it on page 22. No - it’s NOT the same tree!

Jericho during the time of Jesus was a well-to-do town. It was one of the major tax centers in that part of the Roman Empire. Zacchaeus apparently was very successful in his business, although perhaps guilty of some shady practices. Though he was despised by many people, he must have reached out desperately for the love of God. Otherwise....why shinny up that tree?

Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus and would let nothing stop him. Not only that, upon meeting the Lord, he became a changed man, making anything right with people he could. He had a change of the way he was living - as should anyone, meeting Jesus the Messiah.

Next week: The Mount of Olives Prophetic Unveiling By Jesus! One of the most powerful documents ever given to us - anywhere or anytime.