

A DYING SOCIALITE BECOMES A LIVING SACRIFICE

Luke 8:1-3

In writing to the Corinthians, Paul said: "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty" (I Corinthians 126-27). The Countess of Huntington, who was very fond of quoting these verses, quietly reminded her listeners that Paul said, "not many noble are called." Had Paul stated "not any noble are called," the countess would have been prevented from joining the ranks of the blessed. In all probability she would have welcomed an opportunity of speaking with Joanna, the wife of Herod's prime minister. These two ladies from the highest society would have had much in common.

Down through the centuries there have been wise, mighty, and noble people who have been transformed by the grace of God. We think of people like Count Zinzendorf, Madam Guyon, and Lady Huntington. The latter was an English noblewoman of great distinction, who was converted under the street preaching of a flaming evangelist named Rowland Hill. She used to take great delight in remarking, in subsequent years, that she owed her salvation to the letter "M," for if the text read "Not any noble" rather than "not many noble" she would have not been saved.

Joanna comes into this category. She was a lady of the court, for she was the wife of Herod's Chancellor of the Exchequer. Chuza was the official who looked after the king's financial interests. Indeed, there was no more trusted official than Chuza. In every sense of the word, therefore, Joanna was a socialite with everything to live with, but nothing for which to live. Then, one day she met the Saviour, and a dying socialite became a living sacrifice. Let us trace her story.

I. Joanna's Deliverance By Christ.

"And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven demons, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance" (Luke 8:2-3). It is most suggestive that the name of this eminent woman is second on the list of female disciples. Joanna lived in the palace until she encountered Jesus Christ and experienced a mighty deliverance. The Lord Jesus effected a twofold deliverance in her life:

1. A deliverance from sickness.

"Certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven demons, and Joanna." It is not clear whether she had been delivered of evil spirits or healed of some infirmity, but we know that a great sense of need had brought her to the Saviour. Her position in society, and the wealth which attended her station in life, guaranteed for her the best medical skill available in the land. Doubtless, her elegant home had been visited by the king's own physician again and again, and no expense had been spared in seeking relief from her complaint. Yet every attempt had failed, and finally this lady had been left with the unpleasant prospect of being ill for the rest of her life. She was a dying socialite. But then she heard of Jesus of Nazareth. She came to Him, and "was healed of her infirmity."

How many lives have been brought into touch with the Great Physician because of some dread disease or impending death! A little while ago a lady was telling the story of her conversion. Although she had heard the gospel of Christ many times, she had never received the Saviour, and then a serious illness called for immediate surgery. As she was being wheeled into the operating room the surgeon was informed that an even more urgent case required surgery. So this lady was moved into a nearby room to await her turn. Lying there she had time for reflection, and the need to get right with God was made intensely real to her. There and then she accepted Christ as her Saviour and enthroned Him as her Lord. A wonderful peace came into her soul, and she was ready for whatever lay before her. Wonderful as such stories are, they do reflect the sad fact that many of us never think of God, of Christ, or of salvation until we are on beds of sickness.

But Joanna experienced something far deeper than this. Christ effected in her:

2. A deliverance from sin.

We read that "the twelve were with him, and certain women,...and Joanna." No one can walk with Christ Jesus without first having experienced deliverance from sin. Sooner or later they will not be able to stand the glory of His presence and the challenge of His message. Judas ultimately found this out, for we read that he went out "and it was night" (John 13:30). John must have been thinking of this when he wrote: "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (I John 1:7).

Joanna knew a fellowship with the Saviour because she had been freed from the bondage of sin. Do you know this fellowship in your life? Is the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleansing you from all sin moment by moment? If you cannot answer in the affirmative, then seek deliverance in and through Jesus Christ as both your Saviour and your Sovereign.

II. Joanna's Devotion To Christ.

"Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance."

These words bring before us a feature in this period of our Lord's ministry which is not recorded elsewhere, those possibly implied in Luke 23:49. The Master and His disciples had formed a traveling company. When they arrived at a village, or town, or city, they held what we would call in our day a crusade or a mission. The twelve would herald His approach and invite the people to listen to Christ as He taught in the synagogue, the marketplace, or on the open plain. Another company, consisting of devout women, mostly of the wealthier class, journeyed probably in advance, arranging for the reception and the feeding of the Master and His followers. This procedure was in line with the prevailing practice of women of means who supported the rabbis in their work as teachers.

The record tells us what was done on this tour. They were "preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God." The words here used are instructive. The word translated "preaching" emphasizes the side of declaring the Word of God.

It emphasizes the authoritative aspect of preaching. The word translated "shewing the glad tidings" emphasizes the Christian privilege of telling the good news of the gospel of Christ. The Bible tells the story of how Christ went forth preaching and evangelizing, and how there went with Him the twelve apostles and certain women.

What a company this was—Christ and His fellow preachers and His faithful women! Two things about the ministry of these women should be mentioned. First, they ministered to Christ by companying with Him. God's Word says: "And certain women were with him." They gave Him the support of their presence. They gave Him the encouragement of their hearing. They helped to make up His congregation. They showed their interest in His preaching. What a comfort they were to Him! Second, they "ministered unto him of their substance." The service of the Lord Jesus always requires the substance of His people. Christ wants all of His followers to be active in His service. He has His preachers to preach, His laymen to speak and witness, and His women to minister. He wants all of them to propagate the gospel with their support and service.

1. Joanna sacrificed her name.

The very fact that the Holy Spirit has recorded these details makes it plain that it was generally known that Joanna was the wife of Chuza and was part of the traveling company. Up until then, her name was popular among the socialites, and as a lady of the court she was respected for her station in life. But all of this meant little or nothing to her, once she had looked into the face of Jesus Christ; she was prepared to sacrifice her name.

2. Joanna sacrificed her home.

"And the twelve were with him, ...and Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward." The elegance, luxury, and comfort of a noblewoman's residence in Roman times was indescribably fabulous; and there is not any reason to believe that this was not so of Joanna's home.

Indeed, it may well have comprised part of the palace, or at least a house adjacent to the king's quarters; but once she had met the Saviour, her lovely home was secondary. She was ready to part with it in order to travel the dusty roads of Palestine as a member of the Master's Evangelistic Team.

3. Joanna sacrificed her wealth.

"Joanna ...ministered unto him of her substance." Her very position in life would afford her great wealth. The jewelry, money, and servants were gladly relinquished in order that she might minister to her Lord. She lavished her treasures upon her Master.

4. Joanna sacrificed her life.

She did not merely lend her name, or offer her home, or subscribe and contribute her wealth, but she gave her life to Christ. Her hands helped to wash His clothes, prepare His meals, and make His bed for the night. In other words, time, talents and strength were employed by her in the service of her Lord. This is true devotion to Christ. Nobody has sacrificed for the Lord Jesus unless he can say, "I have given my name, my home, my wealth, and my life to Him."

Have you been delivered from sin by the Saviour? Then what is the measure of your devotion to Christ? Have you yielded your all to Him? Is your name, your home, your wealth, and your life at His disposal?

This woman was once a dying socialite, but now she has become a living sacrifice, fully yielded to her Lord as her reasonable service.

III. Joanna's Dependence On Christ.

On the morning of the resurrection, we are told: "It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles" (Luke 24:10).

The Lord Jesus had been crucified and His body had been laid in the tomb. But amidst these sad days, these brave women had shone as stars in a dark sky. Early on that morning they had planned to visit the tomb with specially prepared spices; but as they approached the sacred spot, they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre, and two men, in shining garments, who challenged them with these words: "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again" (Luke 24:5-7). And then occurs this amazing statement: "And they (Joanna among them) remembered his words, 'and' ... told these things unto the apostles" (Luke 8:8, 10). Even with the shattering events that had taken place, Joanna had not lost her faith. Her dependence on Christ was still intact. To her Christ was:

1. The Lord of truth.

She "remembered his words." He had said, "I am the truth," and "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." Then had come the darkness of Calvary and her faith had been tested to its depths, but on this morning, as the shining ones repeated His words concerning the death, burial and resurrection, we read that she "remembered his words." To her Christ was the Lord of truth. He could be trusted implicitly and forever. Christ does not mean anything to anyone who does not trust His Word. If I trust Christ, I believe and trust what He says. Joanna "remembered his words." What a glorious revelation of her dependence on Christ!

2. The Lord of life.

"Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen." And we read that Joanna "told these things unto the apostles." The fact that her words seemed to the disciples as nonsense, or idle tales, did not deter her; Christ Jesus was alive and she knew it. In fact, so convincing was her testimony that while the rest were unbelieving, Peter arose and ran to the sepulchre to verify her report.

Here, then, we see the nature of true dependence on Christ. To trust Christ is to believe in Him as the Lord of truth and the Lord of life. If He is the Lord of truth, and He is, then I cannot doubt anything He says, If He is the Lord of life, and He is, then I cannot doubt anything He does. As truth and life, He supplies not only the ethic for living, but also the dynamic for living.

If Joanna, the dying socialite who became a living sacrifice, needed Christ, what

shall we say of your need and ~~and~~ mine? If she could humble herself to acknowledge her sickness and sin, in order to know the deliverance of the Son of God, then what about your need and mine? But do not leave it there. Deliverance leads to devotion, and devotion leads to the sacrifice of anything and everything. And even that is not all. In a totally committed life, devotion implies a dependence which goes on trusting, even through the Gethsemanes and Calvaries, proving beyond any shadow of a doubt that Christ is both Lord of truth and Lord of life. Has He become truth and life to you? If not, why not?