

Ever feel left out? Then you can identify with me. I was Peter's brother. Peter, the outspoken one of the Apostles, and maybe the best known. As young men, we were fishing partners with James and John, the sons of Zebedee. The four of us were inseparable.

We were some of the earliest of Jesus' followers, and continued to be very close. But the longer we were with Jesus, the more I seemed to be distanced from the other three. For instance, when Jesus went on the Mount of Transfiguration, he took the other three, but not me.¹ On the night Jesus was betrayed by Judas and he went to pray, he took the other three, but not me.²

In fact, except for Jesus calling me, and then me telling Peter about Jesus, I am hardly ever mentioned, except in the listings of the apostles. Well, John did mention that I pointed out the boy with the five loaves and two fishes that kickstarted the feeding of the five thousand. And, I did get to join the other three when Jesus talked about the upcoming destruction of the Temple, but I was certainly never as important as Peter, James, and John.

I've wondered all my life why things turned out that way. Not smart enough? Not personable enough? Did I do something wrong? Maybe caused Jesus not to like me as much as the other three? I would never know during my lifetime why things turned out that way, but as I drew near to the end of my life, here is what I began to think. Jesus knew I depended too much on the other three, and he wanted me to depend only on him, and the Holy Spirit. Jesus knew that I would spend most of my adult life by myself as I went around spreading the Gospel. He knew how I needed to develop, even though it made me feel left out. Perhaps you are developing some good characteristics during your time of feeling left out?

I was with the other apostles when Jesus left Jericho and started toward Jerusalem. We didn't know it, but Jesus was nearing the end of his life, and would spend his last week on earth teaching in his father's house, the Temple. After a long day of walking from Jericho, we approached the towns of Bethphage and Bethany, which are located near the east side of the Mount of Olives, only a few miles from the Temple.

He turned to two of the disciples and told them to go to the next village and find a donkey colt there which no one had ridden, untie it, and return with it. If anyone questioned them, they were to simply say that the Lord needed it. Knowing that Jesus had friends in the area, none of

¹ Matthew 17:1

² Matthew 26:37

us thought much about the request, other than Jesus didn't seem tired enough to need a donkey.

Sometime later, they returned and reported that they had been questioned as Jesus suspected, and the owners of the donkey had let them have it after hearing their reply. Some of us tossed our cloaks on the donkey since it had no blanket, and Jesus got on to ride. And that is when things went wonky.

As our group went along the road, people started laying their cloaks on the ground. We began to understand that Jesus was enacting the role of a king, a victorious king. When we topped the Mount of Olives, it took our breath away.

Across the Kidron Valley, the Temple was gleaming in the midday sunlight. Its gold plating like an ethereal mirror. On the east side of the Temple Mount and on the west side of the Mount of Olives, thousands of families who had travelled for the Passover were camped out. Their campfire smokes rose in the air like thousands of fires of sacrifice. We disciples broke out in praise, and the louder we got, the more the crowds in the valley pitched in. As Jesus started down the steep path, more cloaks were placed on his path, people waving palm branches in joyful praise. The valley ringing with cries:

“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” and “Peace in heaven and glory to God in the highest.”

Other Psalms were quoted and the people believed they were seeing their Messiah. But their enthusiasm would soon be quenched. The jealous Pharisees in the crowd immediately started demanding that Jesus silence his disciples. He told them that if his disciples were quiet, the very stones would praise instead.

As he neared the Kidron Valley at the bottom of the hill, Jesus began to weep. In words that none of us could fully comprehend, he began to prophesy about the coming destruction of the city and the Temple. He knew Jerusalem was God's special possession, and he could see its destruction as surely as he could see the dust and rocks on the path in front of him. He also knew that its future could change if its citizens would just recognize him as Lord...but he also knew they would not.

Let's pause, I need to point out something important for you to remember as you read any of the Gospels. None of them were written in strict chronological order like you are used to. The writers' intent was to impart truth, not follow a writing convention, an unimportant writing convention at that. Luke uses this time in his narrative to talk about Jesus cleansing the Temple, while Mark and Matthew placed that event much earlier in their narratives. Regardless of when Jesus cleansed the Temple by driving out the moneychangers, or if he did it two different times, you can rest assured that it did happen.

For several days in the last week of his life, Jesus kept a predictable pattern. He would rise early and pray, walk to the Temple with his disciples and teach the people, and then return to the Mount of Olives where he would spend the night. The Jewish officials were so unhappy with Jesus that they wanted to kill him, but the people were so enamored with him that the officials could not risk a riot. The Roman soldiers in the Antonia Fortress at the northwest corner of the Temple grounds were just waiting for an excuse to exert their superiority, and a riot would be a perfect excuse.

The Jewish officials tried to downplay Jesus to the people so they could maintain their own authority, but he would turn the tables on them. One day they went directly at him by asking him by whose authority he taught. They were accustomed to exerting authority that they had given each other, or the authority that came through being a descendant of Aaron. Apparently, they hadn't learned that Jesus wasn't an easy victim.

Jesus replied, "I will also ask you a question. Tell me: John's baptism – was it from heaven or of human origin?" That confounded them. Many of them had been baptized by John the Baptist, and the entire crowd revered John as a true prophet. They knew the crowd would violently turn on them if they said human origin, but they did not want to agree that John was a prophet. So, they replied that they didn't know where it was from. Jesus then refused to answer their question, which delighted the crowd.

Another time, they wanted to trap Jesus into saying something that could cause the Romans to take him away. Knowing the people hated paying taxes to the Romans, the Jewish authorities asked him the precarious question, "Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" That question was charged in other ways. First, by paying taxes to Caesar, it was almost like agreeing to the emperor worship the Romans demanded. Second, the Jews had to convert their money to Roman money in order to pay taxes, which was costly. And, the Roman money had images of the emperor on it, so it was like they were handling an idol when they handled Roman money.

Seeing through their duplicity, Jesus requested that they show him a denarius coin. Presumably someone had a denarius, and showed it to him. That in itself might have made them look bad. Then, Jesus asked, "Whose image and inscription is on it?" By using the word "image," Jesus was emphasizing the nature of the coin being an idol because the inscriptions typically glorified either the emperor or the empire, and the image on it was of the emperor. It was obvious that the coin was not of God. His conclusion was simply, "Then give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." Rather than answering their question, he taught them about the correct way to look at life.

There are so many, many other stories to tell about the days before Jesus died, but I want to end with my most favorite in Luke's book. I like it because the hero of the story was someone who must have felt left out, like me.

Many of you are under the mistaken impression that we Jews had to give a tithe, or one tenth, of our income to God. In reality, most of us gave closer to 20% or 30%. The tithe was an

automatic, base amount. On top of that, we were required to give other sacrifices at several of the festivals, we had to pay a temple tax, and most of us gave other voluntary offerings for various reasons.

One way to give our offerings on the Temple grounds was to throw coins into some metal bowls, shaped somewhat like a Cornucopia horn. Heavy coins would bounce down the horn and make loud sounds, while small coins would barely be noticed. In other words, just by listening everyone could tell who was throwing in what amount.

As our group was standing there, an older, poor widow approached. I watched Jesus look at her, and thought maybe she reminded him of his own mother. As he watched intently, those around him began watching, and listening, too. I could hear the echoes of the rich peoples' coins as they bounced down the horns. You can just imagine that some of them tried to impress Jesus by throwing in a lot of money. Then, I watched the widow. She feebly reached out and dropped her offering. As the coins fell, I had to strain to hear the little, tiny, faint, ping...ping...ping...ping. And I felt so sorry for her since she knew we were all watching.

Then, I saw the tears in Jesus' eyes, he had to be thinking of his mother. He said, "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of those rich people. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on." I started crying, too.

The poverty of that widow was in stark contrast to the wealth of the Temple and many of the Jewish leaders. Much of the Temple and its ornaments were gold-plated or made of solid gold. When the sun shone, the Temple was so brilliant as to be blinding. It was so overwhelming that we disciples could not help but comment on its beauty.

Jesus' response was so mysterious that we were confused then, and people are still confused two thousand years later. As pertains to the Temple buildings, Jesus seems to have been specifically prophesying how the Temple would be destroyed by the Romans forty years in the future. The very gold that was so beautiful to the disciples would be the cause for the Romans to tear the Temple and part of the Temple Mount to pieces. In order to find the gold that melted in the fires of 70 AD, the Romans would literally tear apart the buildings stone by stone. Even 2000 years later you could go to the Temple mount and see the enormous stones that were thrown down. They've left them exactly as they were. To this day. Some of Jesus' remarks appears to have caused some of the Christians to flee the city prior to the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem.

Although Jesus' prophecies seem to be relatively straightforward concerning the Temple, it is far from clear how Jesus addressed the topics concerning the end of the age, when He would return, and other subjects. For that reason, the chapters of Matthew 24 and 25, and Luke 21 are rich material for those who study prophecy. Without being flippant or understating the importance of Jesus' prophecies, I will sum up what Jesus said: "Nobody knows when the end

will come, either for any person or for the world. So, always be ready. Be ready by preparing to withstand persecution and by behaving as a disciple of Jesus.”

Every day, approximately 152,000 people die in the world. Yesterday, the world ended for approximately 152,000 people. Jesus says you are wise if you are ready for your world to end, and foolish if you are not ready. I beg you, be a disciple of Jesus and live like one, so you are ready!

I started my story telling you how I often felt left out. But, in my loneliness, I couldn't see what Jesus did. My talent was to introduce people to Jesus, and he wanted to sharpen that talent and desire in me. Peter, I introduced him to Jesus. A little boy with five loaves and two fishes, I introduced him to Jesus. A bunch of Greeks who had one chance to meet him, I introduced them to Jesus. I overcame my loneliness by introducing people to Jesus. That same thing will work for you.