

## Houses which Jesus did not need to enter. Bethesda Coffee Morning. 26 February 2014.

As you probably know, this is the second in our series of talks about houses which played a part in the life of our Lord Jesus when He was here in the world.

But this morning's talk is rather different from the others in the series. Because today we will be thinking about houses into which Jesus did **not** enter – and this for the simple reason that on each occasion He was able to meet the need there without actually visiting the home.

I suppose you could say then that my subject for this morning is: 'Houses which Jesus did **not** enter'.

Our Bible reading comprises accounts of three separate healing miracles performed by the Lord Jesus. And I make no apology for the length of the reading. Frankly, what God says is infinitely more important than anything I could ever say.

One incident concerns a Jewish nobleman and his son ... one concerns a Syrophenician woman and her daughter ... and one concerns a Roman centurion and his servant.

First then, the account of the Jewish nobleman (a royal official) and his son:

Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee ... there was a certain royal official whose son was sick at Capernaum (a small town some 15 miles north-east of Cana). When he heard that Jesus had come ... he went to Him and repeatedly implored Him<sup>1</sup> to come and heal his son, for he was about to *die* ... Jesus said to him, 'Go your way; your son *lives*'. The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went his way. And as he was going, his servants met him and told him, 'Your son lives!' He asked them the hour when he began to get better. And they said to him, 'Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him'.  
The father knew it was that very hour when Jesus told him, 'Your son lives.'<sup>2</sup>

Second, the account of the woman from the Phoenician part of Syria and her daughter:

Jesus came into the region of Tyre and Sidon. A woman whose young daughter had an unclean spirit heard about Him, and came and fell at His feet.  
The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by birth, and she pleaded with Him to cast the demon out of her daughter.  
Jesus answered and said to her, 'O woman, great is your faith! Let it be as you desire. Go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter'.  
When she came to her house, she found that her daughter was healed from that very hour.<sup>3</sup>

And, third, the account of the Roman centurion and his servant:

Jesus entered Capernaum, and a certain centurion's servant, who was dear to him, was sick and about to die.  
When the centurion heard about Jesus, he came to Him, pleading with Him, saying, 'Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, suffering terribly'.  
Jesus said to him, 'I will come and heal him'.  
The centurion answered and said, 'Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy that you should come under my roof. But speak the word only, and my servant will be healed ... Jesus said to the centurion, 'Go your way;<sup>4</sup> and as you have believed,<sup>5</sup> so let it be done for you'. And his servant was healed that very hour.<sup>6</sup>

Well, those are the three recorded incidents in the gospels where we are told that our Lord did **not** enter a house because He did not need to.

We have time for only a few simple comments.

First, that when we pray we can be confident that distance presents no obstacle to the Lord.

The fact that the person for whom we are praying is many miles away is totally irrelevant with Him. I note that, although it was not far to the house of the centurion,<sup>7</sup> and although we have no way of knowing how far it was to the house of the Syrophenician, we are specifically told that our Lord happened to be about 15 miles away from the house of the nobleman – that although the Lord spoke in Cana, His word was effective in Capernaum.

Second, that, if He so wills, notwithstanding any distance involved, the Lord can answer our prayers instantly – instantaneously. You may have noticed that each passage I read more or less concluded with the exact same words, ‘that very hour’. Speaking through one Old Testament prophet, the Lord says of a yet future day, ‘While they are yet speaking, I will hear’.<sup>8</sup> And, on occasions, He does just that in our day too.

Thirdly, that the Lord responds to our pleading on behalf of those we love. I note that this was certainly true in each instance of which I read. We are told that the servant of the centurion, and I quote, ‘was dear to him’ – that ‘he was precious to him ... that he meant a lot to him’. And the other two cases concerned children of those who came to Jesus to plead on their behalf.<sup>9</sup> What an encouragement this is for us to pray for our children and loved ones – knowing that no case is outside the range either of the Lord’s care or of His mighty power.

Thinking of these three points – (i) that, with the Lord, distance is no object, (ii) that, if He wills, He can answer our prayers immediately, and (iii) that He delights to hear our prayers for our children and loved ones – let me tell you briefly of the conversion experience of James Hudson Taylor of China Inland Mission fame.

When he was about seventeen years of age he went one afternoon into his father's library in search of a book with which to while away the time. Finally he picked up a gospel booklet. ‘I sat down to read the little book in an utterly unconcerned state of mind’, he later wrote, adding ‘Little did I know at the time what was going on in the heart of my mother, eighty miles away ... Hour after hour she prayed for me’.

Meanwhile, in the course of reading the booklet, Hudson had come upon the expression, ‘The finished work of Christ’. ‘There dawned upon me’, Hudson Taylor wrote, ‘the joyful conviction that, since the whole work was finished and the whole debt paid upon the cross, there was nothing for me to do but to fall upon my knees, accept the Saviour, and praise Him for evermore!’<sup>10</sup> A marvellous instance of the prayer of a loving parent, answered instantly and at no small distance.

But I have one final comment; that according to all three passages we have read, the Lord’s word carried immense power. ‘Speak the word only’, the centurion said – and events proved, on all three occasions, that he was right. Think of the nobleman, when our Lord’s word shot faster than lightning those 15 or so miles to heal the man’s dying son. The Great Physician had no need to pay a home visit!

For, according to the gospels, neither disease nor distance – any more than the elements, demons, the devil or death – were a match for His powerful word.

Indeed there was only one thing which lay outside the range of His powerful word – and that was my spiritual need. For, as one who had sinned against God, I needed something which would cost Him much more than His word. I needed, in Bible language, to be saved – and that would cost Him, not His word, but His life.

I mentioned just now Hudson Taylor’s reference to ‘The finished work of Christ’ on the cross. And I want to finish with a quote about the cross which I stumbled on only last evening. It comes from a Mr William Sawtrey. Mr Sawtrey lived way back in the fourteenth century and was a follower of John Wycliffe, the leader of an early reformation movement. For his troubles, 613 years ago today, on 26 February 1401, he was condemned by the Catholic Church for heresy and sentenced to death. On the direct command of the king, he was publicly burned at the stake. The first and main charge brought against him was, and I quote: ‘He saith, That he will not worship the cross on which Christ suffered, but only Christ that suffered upon the cross’.<sup>11</sup> I have read that Mr Sawtrey’s exact words were, ‘Instead of adoring the cross on which Christ suffered, I adore Christ who suffered on it’.<sup>12</sup>

May God help each of us to do just that.

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> The imperfect tense of the verb "besought/requested/begged" implies repeated or persistent action.

<sup>2</sup> John 4. 46-53.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. 15. 21-29 and Mark 7. 24-30.

<sup>4</sup> The expression occurs in all three stories.

<sup>5</sup> Faith is mentioned in all three stories.

<sup>6</sup> Matt. 8. 5-13 and Luke 7. 1-10.

<sup>7</sup> Luke 7. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Isa. 65. 24.

<sup>9</sup> Some time ago, I was struck by the very high proportion of our Lord's recorded miracles which He performed for the benefit of children – among the girls there was not only the daughter of the Syrophenician woman, but the daughter of Jairus a synagogue ruler at Capernaum – and among the boys there was not only the nobleman's son, but the son of the widow of Nain and the son of the man who met Jesus at the foot of what we call the mount of transfiguration. But what really impressed me was that not one of these children asked Him to do anything for them. Any request came from a parent.

<sup>10</sup> Morgan, R. J. (2000). Nelson's complete book of stories, illustrations, and quotes (electronic ed.) (629). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.thereformation.info/sawtrey.htm>

<sup>12</sup> Church History Calendar 2012, published NityJyoti.