

On the Corner

Politics, power and passion

by Robert Docter –

He must have upset some very important people—this man Jesus, now moving around in the upper Galilee. He seemed to be attracting a sizeable amount of attention. Preaching, feeding, and having fellowship with 5,000 people does indicate some substantial popularity with the masses.

This popularity, however, did not extend to the religious establishment. They were very concerned and had decided to monitor his actions carefully. A delegation of church leaders from Jerusalem confronted him in the upper Galilee shortly after his massed meal and open-air service. He called them hypocrites and charged them with abandoning the commands of God in favor of the traditions of men.

Neither was he esteemed by the political establishment. It felt the same kind of power threat. Herod, tetrarch of Galilee, wanted to find out about this person more popular than the king himself. His “cabinet” stated that many believed he was John the Baptist. Now, Herod had recently beheaded this fellow, and such a rumor elevated his anxiety significantly.

Herod ruled the Galilee. Jesus must have perceived some danger in this and decided it might be a good time to travel elsewhere—out of that jurisdiction. You see, he wasn’t ready for an all out confrontation yet, but he knew it couldn’t be avoided much longer. There was still much to do.

With his disciples, he moved north, out of Galilee into a friendlier region—up toward Tyre and Sidon in Phoenicia (Lebanon)—then made a big circle through what is now Syria where he preached, taught and healed mostly Gentiles.

During this time, he sought feedback from his disciples concerning his image with the general public. He asked them specifically: Who do people say I am?

They replied: “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah or one of the prophets.”



Jesus must have felt positive about these answers from individuals he trusted. Daily, they were in the market-places of the towns visited. People saw him as among the great in the history of Israel. They perceived him as genuinely unique—as someone coming from God.

Then he asked the disciples a harder question—one we all have to answer: But what about you? Who do you say I am?

With a burst of insight, Peter answered: “You are the Christ.”

He warned them to keep silent about this and then, speaking very plainly, he told them that he, the Son of Man, must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law—that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

Peter, this time with a great burst of emotion, took him aside and rebuked him.

Jesus turned and looked at him—imagine that look—and said to the one who had just identified him as Messiah—the Christ: Get behind me, Satan. You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men. He needed them to understand that the process by which God works demands sacrifice, and that they, and those after them, would be called upon to preach the remarkable paradox of mankind’s relationship with God—to deny self in order to achieve it—to lose what is perceived as life in order to find it—to abandon thoughts of worldly wealth and power in order to achieve true wealth and power—for what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

In that region north of the Galilee and east of the Jordan, on one of the gentler summits of Mt. Hermon, Jesus had a remarkable experience. He became “transfigured”—his clothes became brilliantly white, and was observed by Peter, James and John to be in conversation with Elijah and Moses. Suddenly, the voice of God burst upon them from an enveloping cloud: This is my beloved Son, whom I love. Listen to him.

And from that moment on, he turned his face steadfastly to Jerusalem—ready now for the confrontation—ready for his sacrifice on that fateful Friday afternoon—teaching his disciples the roles and responsibilities they must assume in the days and years following his death, resurrection and ascension.

In this present age—we are those disciples.