

Fishers of men?

It turned out to be a long day. We spent the morning walking with Rabbi Jesus around the lake side. He talked, we listened and we helped him persuade the various villagers we talked to, to meet with us later in the afternoon near an old tree, which would provide



a degree of shelter from the heat of the sun. Then we all sat at the feet of the Rabbi and listened as he told us stories about Yahweh, and helped us to understand him better. As the sun began to climb back down towards the horizon, we made our way back to our homes. Rabbi Jesus walked with us, not talking now, as he was just too exhausted from all that he had done during the day.

We knew that the day could not be over for us yet, as we still had to go out in our boats to fish to provide food for our families and our neighbours. We invited Rabbi Jesus to sit in the boat with us as we worked. For hours we threw our nets over the side of the boat and dragged them in, empty, time after time, and the Rabbi just sat in the front of the boat gazing out over the water apparently seeing nothing but the water. Suddenly, as we were just discussing turning to return to our village he pointed a bit further out and said,

‘Throw your nets out over there.’

My brother protested,

‘We are tired, and we don’t think there are any fish in this area of the lake today. We will try again tomorrow morning.’

Rabbi Jesus just looked at him.

‘Trust me’ he said.

My brother shrugged, so we got out our paddles, and moved the boat where he had indicated. We threw our nets over the side, and set to haul them in again, but instead of them pulling freely through the water, they felt heavy, very heavy, as if they were full of fish. We looked at each other, and then began to haul with all our strength. Rabbi Jesus looked at our faces, smiled, and then bent himself to the task of helping us pull the nets into the boat without breaking them or losing any of the fish. We eventually managed to get them all in, and elated we sailed back home.

Back on the beach we went and fetched baskets, lots of them and unloaded the fish, carrying them into a cool room for the night ready to sell and barter in the morning, not to mention give a share to the tax collector. Just as we reached the door of his house, my brother turned to Rabbi Jesus

‘How did you know those fish were there? You are a carpenter. I have fished on the lake all my life, and I didn’t know that there were fish where you said there were.’ Rabbi Jesus just smiled.

‘Don’t worry about trying to find fish in the lake, I will make you fishers of men.

‘What on earth do you mean? You can’t fish for men?’

Rabbi Jesus smiled again, turned, waved back at him, and walked away to the house he was staying in.

I just stared after him, fishers of men? Rabbi Jesus had taught us a lot, he had shared stories with us and the crowds. He had shared the meaning of the stories with us afterwards. I was pretty sure that Rabbi Jesus knew little about fishing, but a lot about men. What on earth did he mean by ‘Fishers of men’!

I had a really strange dream that night. I was out in the boat with my brother. Rabbi Jesus was on the shore with one end of our long net, we had the other with us in the boat. We were working together as we sometimes do with our friends. On this occasion Rabbi Jesus was pulling the end of the net along the shore, and we were rowing keeping up with him parallel to the shore. As we rowed we could feel the net getting heavier, so at last I called to the Rabbi to stop walking, and we rowed to shore pulling the net with us. I then held the boat in place, and my brother jumped out and he and Rabbi Jesus pulled the full net in to the beach, landing the catch of fish with every pull of the net. I beached the boat and ran to help them pull in the net. It was full of flapping silver fish. Once we had got them all out of the water, we began to sort them all out, throwing back the small ones which we would want to grow bigger before we eat them.

Strangely though I began to notice in my dream that the heads of the fish were not fish heads, but heads of men and women, covered in scales. When I looked closer they appeared to be the men and women we had been talking to with Rabbi Jesus that day. Out of their mouths came the words ‘Save me, save me’. When it really registered what I was seeing, I threw the fish back down in horror. I turned and started to run away, but the fish got up on their tails and began to flap behind me, following me, and they could move fast, I turned and looked back and there seemed more and more of them coming after me, and it all became too much, and I awoke in a sweat with my wife shaking me demanding that I wake up.

When I next met up with the others I told them about my dream. They just laughed at me. Rabbi Jesus did not. When we were walking together to the next village where he wanted to introduce himself, he took me aside and began to talk to me.

‘I enjoyed hearing about your dream. It is not exactly what I meant though. For now I just want you to watch and listen and learn, and I will ask you again at some point in the future to tell me what you think I meant.’

So I watched and I listened and learned for three years, wandering through the countryside talking to individuals, talking to groups, talking to more people than I

have ever seen gathered together in one place. We met with fishermen, tax collectors and farmers over food in their houses, and in secret with important people who didn't want others to know that they were interested in the message of Rabbi Jesus. Under his gaze we began ourselves to share the message of Yahweh under the watchful eye of the Roman authorities, and we were all increasingly being challenged by our leaders in the Sanhedrin, who sent out spies and scholars to watch Rabbi Jesus, to challenge and to try and wrong foot him. I thought they were being very unfair, as we were only teaching about Yahweh, and surely Yahweh was for us all, not just for those in authority.

When I brought my mind back to the question of 'Fishers of Men,' I could see that we were a bigger group moving together through the countryside. We were just the twelve of us to begin with, and gradually as Rabbi Jesus spoke about Yahweh and enthused people about having a personal relationship with him; as he healed people and released them from their fears, from having been taken over by the devil, some chose to walk with us, sometimes for days or weeks. Others stayed with us all the time. As well as the twelve of us men, there was also a group of women, a number of whom had influential husbands, and money they could use to help us buy food or pay for a bed for a night, where we were not given one, or could not safely lie out in the edges of the fields wrapped in our cloaks.

Rabbi Jesus began to send us out in pairs without him, to the villages, to preach the message he had taught us, to heal in his name. We weren't always successful. Sometimes the Elders of a village would have us thrown out, either because they were afraid of the authorities, ours or the Romans or just because, I guess they were scared for their own authority over their people. The Yahweh I had come to know was not the Yahweh that I had been taught by the Rabbi in my village.

Then came the dreadful final days of Rabbi Jesus, his arrest by the authorities, his trial, his crucifixion, his burial in the tomb of our friend Joseph of Arimathea. Then there was the day of his resurrection and the joy of seeing him again. But he was no longer with us all of the time, and we were aimless and discouraged. We knew that Rabbi Jesus had promised us a comforter, and that we needed to return to Jerusalem in a while, but we all drifted back to our villages.

It was there that Rabbi Jesus found some of us fishing. It had been one of those nights where we had thrown our nets time after time, but caught nothing. We were so low when the pink of morning began to tip the sky. Suddenly we noticed a man on the shore waving to us and pointing at a spot not too far from where we were casually drifting. My brother who was with us frowned and said

'I think that is Rabbi Jesus'.

He made as if to jump over the side of the boat to go to him, but I said,

'Remember what Rabbi Jesus did before, let us throw our nets where he is gesturing, and see.'

So we threw, and gathered more fish than we could get in the boat, so my brother hung on to the net, and we rowed to the shore. Rabbi Jesus helped us pull in the net, and gathering a few of the fish skilfully prepared them and set them over the fire to cook, while we secured the boat and our nets.

When we were all sitting and eating, talking and laughing together, just as we had before, Rabbi Jesus turned to me and asked

‘Fishers of Men?’

I stopped eating and looked away to the sun rising on a new day.

‘I think that you want us to fish with words and deeds. You want us to throw a net of Yahweh’s love over his people, to protect them and bring them safely to him at the end of time. You want Yahweh to be proclaimed to all his people, and you want us to gather all who will listen and learn, and who will in their turn go out and share is message. You want us all to be gathered into Yahweh’s Kingdom, the kingdom you have taught us about and have died for. Jesus looked at me and smiled,

‘You have listened and learned well. Now go and fish for men.’