

From The Pulpit

by Rev. Donald M. Clark

PERSONAL PROFILES AT CALVARY
(Nicodemus)

THE SHADOWS OF THE YEARS were lengthening across the old man's life. Gathering the tattered remnants of his once-costly robe more tightly around his gaunt body, he shivered as the cold North-East wind swept down the street where we stood. He shivered. . .but as he did, he smiled as well, and then he spoke: "You wonder at my poverty, don't you? Oh, I know, I know much sympathy has been wasted on me! Poor Nicodemus, they say, 'he once was able to spend 12,000 denarii for his daughter's marriage, and he was the third officer in the great Sanhedrin, but look at him now!' And they tug at their beards and shake their heads in pity.

Others waste no pity on me, but spit on the ground as they pass me, to display their scorn and disgust--Pity or scorn, what matters. They blame it all on Jesus. . .do you remember Him?

YES, IT DID begin with Jesus. I was once a member of the great Sanhedrin and I was rich, and respected--but I wasn't happy or contented.

I was bothered because my religion didn't satisfy my heart, or answer my questions, nor solve my problems. Tasteless, tedious tradition was inadequate, and the endless round of ritual wearied my soul. Priests who palavared for money; prophets who taught only what was expected of them, elders, scribes -- all were caught up in the disastrous web of hypocrisy. I was discontent, unhappy until He came. Oh, how well I remember, as though it were yesterday, the sound of His voice, 'as one having authority', the look in His eyes, as though he saw the secret chamber of my heart, the power in His touch as He healed and helped the hitherto hopeless multitudes. I watched Him; I listened to Him; I followed Him --until I could stand the strain no longer. I must see Him! I must find if all I had been taught and practiced were wrong, and He was right--I must talk with Him--alone--somewhere, sometime when no one will see me, for after all, I was in the Sanhedrin!



REV. D. M. CLARK

Finally, one night as the soft veil of evening shrouded the city, I made my solitary way along the darkened streets of silent Jerusalem, until I saw flickering lights from His lamp in the Aliyah. His disciples slumbered in the lower room, so I climbed quietly, yet quickly, up the outside stairs to gain entrance to His presence.

HE SAW ME before I saw Him, for He stood facing the doorway as though expecting me. Do I remember what was said? How could I forget? Those words are graven forever in my heart. I said: "Rabbi we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him," but he disregarded this and replied: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." I was disappointed. What sort of doctrine was this? Why "how can a man be born again when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?"

But Jesus said: "Verily, Verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." And then lifting His arm and letting the gentle breeze blow His robe, He continued: "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

BUT HERE I WANTED a solution for the problem of my heart, and He now talked about strange spiritual requirements for entrance to the Kingdom--Why, we weren't concerned with OUR entering the Kingdom, but the Kingdom's entrance

into our nation and race. . . So, I asked: "How can these things be? And Jesus answered: "Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven."

We talked long that night, so I didn't leave until the first silver streaks of dawn appeared on the eastern horizon. Oh, the strange exhilaration of my soul! The stirring in my heart!

For a year the glowing embers of that fire first ignited on the altar of my heart kept burning. But I was ashamed--ashamed to admit that He was the Messiah to the others in the Sanhedrin. Even when they plotted his capture, I kept silent--a silence that was betrayal. But when the soldiers came back empty handed, my heart leaped for joy. . .but my fellow-Sanhedrinists were angry; "Why have ye not brought Him?" they cried. The officers answered, "Never man spake like this man." Then the Pharisees answered and said: "Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers or any of the Pharisees believed on him? But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed."

Jumping to my feet, I cried: "Doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doeth?" But I was afraid to go on, and I failed, I failed to defend Him. . .the glowing embers were cold, the fire had died of neglect, and only the cold, gray ashes of my failure remained. Sleepless nights and remorse-filled days followed--with nothing but storms buffeting my soul. I, a Teacher in Israel, how could I teach any longer the traditions in which I no longer believed? And yet, the growing fear in my mind was this--suppose He is a fraud, and an Imposter after all?

AND THEN IT HAPPENED. Like the angry belching of the red-throated volcano, the lava of hate was spewed out suddenly, engulfing us all in its burning tide. In swift succession Jesus was taken captive, given a mock trial and led away to be crucified. Oh, the painful memories of those hours!

I stood by helplessly, as they spit on Him, mocked Him, scourged Him, and crucified Him. I can hear yet the hoarse cries of the hate-filled mob--the curt orders of the soldiers, the soft sobbing of the women, the bitter cursing of the malefactors, the heart-heavy sigh of the Saviour as the flesh was torn by the nails biting through to the wood of the Cross. I can see still the wild look of fear on Pilate's face, the smouldering glare in the eyes of the chief priests, the cruel welts on Jesus' back, where He'd been scourged, the blood as it flowed from the jagged wounds in His hands and feet--the darkness that descended like a dark shroud by which the earth was to be covered,

I left with the others--but I came back at evening and brought a mixture of myrrah and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. There was no one on the hill now, except Joseph of Arimathea and myself--and we set about our task of removing the body of Jesus from the Cross. Oh how we worked! With none to help, we could hardly lift Him--and we couldn't see--our eyes were dim with tears. Our muscles ached, our hands were torn by the splinters from the rough Cross, but finally we lifted Him and carried Him tenderly to Joseph's cool tomb. After anointing His body with my spices and wrapping the cloth about Him, we rolled the stone across the opening.

YOU KNOW THE REST of the story, how my wonderful Lord dispelled the darkness of the tomb of death by the glorious light of His resurrection; how He spoke to His disciples; how He ascended to Heaven after promising that He would return.

What happened to me? Well, I was baptized by Peter and John, and was promptly shipped to my office, beaten and driven from Jerusalem--and here I am, old, forgotten, forsaken, poverty stricken--oh, no, my friend I am not poor, but rich, rich beyond the wealth of this world. "Forasmuch as I know that I am not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from vain conversation received by tradition from our fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: (I Peter 1:18, 19). Where once I was in turmoil, now I know Heaven's peace, where once I was filled with fear of death, I now have life eternal, and it is well with my soul.

OPERATION MEDICARE

"Operation Medicare Alert" workers are canvassing the West Las Vegas areas this week, Ann Maius, project director, has announced. The following is a schedule of meetings planned by the Social Security Administration office and the Office of Economic Opportunity, joint sponsors of "Medicare Alert."

- Wed., Feb. 23, 7 PM--St. James Baptist Church, 312 Madison.
- Thurs., Feb. 24, 7 PM--Bethel Baptist, 400 Adams
- Fri., Feb. 25, 8 PM--Evergreen Baptist, 'H' and Madison.
- Fri., Feb. 25, 7 PM--Church of God, 1525 'D' St.
- Thurs., Feb. 24, 8 PM--2nd Baptist, Madison and 'E' Sts.
- Mon., Feb. 28, 7 PM--Madison School, Madison and 'J' Sts.
- Mon., Feb. 28, 8 PM--Doolittle Center, Lake Mead and 'J' Sts.
- Tues., Mar. 1, 8 PM--Kit Carson School, 1735 N. 'D' St.
- Wed., Mar. 2, 7 PM--Highland School, Highland and Bartlett Sts.
- Tues., Mar. 1, 7 PM--Jo Mackey School, Duke and Queen Sts.

THE PUBLIC is invited to attend, even urged, as all questions regarding the Medicare program can be answered at the meetings in detail.



St. James Catholic Church

'H' and Morgan Sts. Phone: 384-9953

- Sunday Masses: 11 A.M. - 5 P.M.
- Weekday Masses: 7:30 A.M. - Sat. 9 A.M.
- Religion Classes for Children
- Mondays 4-5 P.M. * Saturdays 9-10:30 A.M.
- Rosary Recited Each Night: 7:30
- Join us in our prayer for World Peace
- Adult Classes each night after Rosary

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LENTEN SERVICES

Wednesday, February 23 - Ash Wednesday
Blessing of the Ashes before 7:30 a.m. Mass
MASS will be offered again in the evening at 7:30 ** The Ashes will be distributed after each Mass.

FRIDAY during LENT

STATIONS of the CROSS begin at 7:30 in the evenings followed by BENEDICTION of the BLESSED SACRAMENT
During the Holy Season of Lent--Mass will be offered EACH WEDNESDAY NIGHT at 7:30
STATIONS OF THE CROSS
each Friday night at 7:30

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The Church is open each day from 7 A.M. until 8:30 P.M. and all are welcome to come in for prayer and quiet meditation before the Blessed Sacrament.

THE ALPINE IS COMING

TAX RETURNS AGAIN
SAME LOCATION
615 Van Buren
4⁰⁰ 5⁰⁰
12⁵⁰
SCHEDULES EXTRA
WALLY BREWER