

# Jesus Kyrios

## Prologue

Tired, the physician rolled up his scrolls and put them aside. He had only to look up and out of the window to be taken away from all his parchments and writings, by the sight of the sea, vast and blue and sparkling with summer sunshine. From there, the daylight was dancing back in the flash of waves, singing to the harbour, the city, the hills behind, and even to this house of his. He was well placed, for he could look out over the wharves (some people didn't like the area because of the smells that came up from there) and feel their bustle, and contemplate the sea beyond: the great sea around which all the lands of the world were wrapped, as if they were looking and waiting for a ship to bring them news and goods and profits – as indeed they were.

He thought of his own travelling and seafaring days, and of the first journey, when he had set out from home to consult, he had thought, with physicians of many lands, and to learn from them what was wanting to his own very local training. The ships had taken him away then down the long coast by way of the water, catching the wind and boldly standing out, sometimes till the land was no longer visible on the horizon and the world became all sea. He remembered a panicky captain who scurried for port at the first sign of bad weather, and how he had thought that they should know their job and trust their ships more – until they were caught in a storm and all but overturned. After that, he marvelled rather at the sailors' recklessness.

There's a great danger in ships. When you go about in ships you meet too many people who are also travelling, or have travelled to too many places and have too much to tell – too much that's alluring and exciting for your own peace of mind or steadiness of purpose. It's as if, having trusted yourself to the wind, you find yourself blown where you never expected and thinking bold new thoughts that were never part of your plan.

It was on board ship that he first met one of the Jews who followed Jesus of Nazareth; then in the ports of Syria and Phoenicia he had met several more. So that, not very long after he had left Antioch in search of knowledge and experience (in medicine), he was disturbed to find that he was thinking not so much of the famous physicians he met and talked with, as of the "Christians", who seemed to be aware of something more exciting, and more healing, than the best medicine.

He had travelled down the long coast to Sidon and Tyre and then on to Caesarea and Joppa, altho he had not intended to go so far. He had thought that his money would run out – and so it did. But somehow, even that didn't matter any more. Money came, when he needed it, from fellow-travellers or others who were glad to consult a physician, or it just came – as if God himself were paying for the journey. Or Christians gave him lodging, or helped him on his way as they told him their stories – their many stories – of Jesus.

## Jesus Kyrios

He had even left the sea and its easy, cosmopolitan travelling for hazardous roads in a strange country, taking him inland to Tiberias and Capernaum, on the Lake of Galilee and he had met with travellers from Jerusalem ... As he made his way back to Antioch, apparently with plans to settle down, develop his practice and apply what he had learnt, he knew in his heart of hearts that he would soon be travelling again, and that already he was journeying not as a physician in search of knowledge, but as a follower of Jesus of Nazareth, the Jewish Messiah.

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He remembered how, a little later and a little older, he had been asked to treat the Christian traveller and preacher, Paul, who was both a Roman citizen and a messenger of Jesus. They had got on well, and he had gone with Paul, ostensibly as his travelling physician, but really as his missionary assistant and occasional scribe, for there was much to be done and much to be organised for the new converts they were making as they moved from town to town, Paul usually managing to put a lot of backs up, but preaching with a fire and conviction that was irresistible to many others, and with a profound love of Christ Jesus.

Paul had shown him what the Messiah would mean to the Greeks, for Jesus himself had sent Paul to tell the people of the whole Greek world that the rule of God was for them too, that Jesus, the Messiah of Israel, was their Savior and heavenly Lord. Of course Greeks didn't know what "Messiah" meant, even if you translated it and called him "Christos", the anointed one. You couldn't begin to explain such a Jewish concept to the Greeks – and in any case the Jews themselves were scandalised by the meaning of it, when God showed them God's meaning, in the Messiah Jesus. But putting it clearly and simply, Jesus was their Lord and teacher. Lukas found himself among gentile Christians who understood that. Under the rule of the Lord long-promised and now given to Israel, they had discovered salvation for them all.

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Over many years now he had diligently collected, or himself written down, all the information about Jesus, his acts and his teaching and the history of his followers, that he had heard or could lay his hands on – piling it all up and from time to time sifting it thru, deciding what he could use and what he would leave out. He had a good store of material: stories and recollections and other documents, and notes from the Hebrew Scriptures that Jewish followers of the way had taught him to explore. He had, too, the notes of his travels with Paul and a precious little bundle of documents from Jerusalem itself, relating to the early days.

Best of all, he had a collection of Jesus' teachings which the disciple Matthew had made,<sup>1</sup> and the "gospel" written by Mark. How he had wrestled with that work! Mark wrote like an Aramean who had learnt Greek. Perhaps he had been concerned to keep to the story as it came from the apostle Peter, and the fisherman was no trained orator. It was ruf material, but it brought you to Jesus in the hurly-burly of life

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<sup>1</sup> Luke used a good deal of material which Matthew also presents. It is often thought that they got this material from a common document. It could be the Aramaic "gospel" which was later said to have been written by Matthew, but is now lost.

where there was no mistaking God's purpose: to take the world and shake it and restore it in Jesus, the healer and Messiah, crucified, but the Son of God no less.

From Mark's Gospel and Matthew's teachings and other documents that seemed to go to the heart of the matter, he was putting the story together, the work of God and the fulfilment of the history of Israel. He was telling it so that his own people, gentile Christians in the churches he knew, would understand, and he used the language like a born Greek, like an educated and professional man who could be more confident with it than others who had written before him. As a physician, he had opportunities to connect with the literate and influential, respected administrators of the imperial provinces, and to show them the wonder that was already making way among them and changing the world. For they too, needed to know. No administration would be immune to the power of God that was even now taking the world in hand.

Only how do you tell the world that this is its story? How do you present the work of God in the person of a man condemned by the authorities, who was crucified like a slave, who left no monument, no writing, no stunning victory, no splendid feat of government behind him? What authority can you cite in support of his claims and promises, what power or right? There is only the authority of the Jewish scriptures, and abundantly tho those scriptures support him, the Jewish authorities themselves, who surely know their scriptures best, do not. How do you show that the scriptures point to him, when most Jews, and almost all the Jewish authorities, reject his claims outright?

Sometimes, he despaired at the thought that they were asking Greeks to believe of a Jewish God astonishing things that the Jews themselves repudiated.

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He remembered a woman he had met in Philippi, a Jew of Phrygia. She too had been a traveller – but not at all the kind who reflected with understanding on the rich experiences of travel. If she had witnessed the sack of Troy, she would have reported it as a quarrel between her neighbors. If she had been present at the homecoming of Odysseus, she would have commented on husbands getting back late for their dinner. She had travelled with her husband on business, some small but profitable lines in cloth, and they were used to working together. He gathered she had been in Corinth once or twice, but there was something else in her travels that was much more interesting.

She told him how she had been in Jerusalem once, for the festival of Pentecost. (It's a disgrace! They're all thieves there. But they do speak Greek just like civilised people. They were preaching on the sabbath and they spoke as plain and clear as we do in Phrygia.) Lukas realised that she had been present at the great moment when the first disciples of Jesus, newly baptised in the Spirit of God, had begun to proclaim him to Jerusalem. She had witnessed the famous miracle of tongues, when people of all tongues and races, pilgrims to Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost, had all heard and understood the preaching in their own languages.

But for Phyllis, the Phrygian woman, it was all mixed up with a cheating trader. (He pretended he didn't understand us. As if I didn't know! They know their Greek as

well as anyone from Phrygia! Just two days before the Sabbath we did a deal with him and then we found out he had deceived us. He tricked us. We went back to sort him out, but he was gone, his shop all locked up as if he never did any business. His neighbor told us he was always coming and going like that – it looked pretty suspicious to me. Anyway, we were in the street on the holy day, the feast day of Pentecost, you know. That’s one of the reasons we were in Jerusalem, for we’re both God-respecting and Law-abiding Jews and we have our religious sensibilities. So we were going to the temple that day, and there he was, as big as life, just walking down the street! We tackled him. We asked him what he ment by stringing us a pack of lies. That’s when he tried to tell us there had been a misunderstanding. As if we didn’t know he could speak Greek as good as any of us! And do you know what he tried to tell us then? He sed he couldn’t discuss the matter, because it was a holy day. The hypocrite! I gave him a piece of my mind and would have given him more, but just then the people came out in the street and they all started talking about God – in plain Greek! He must’ve known the game was up, because when I turned round to challenge him, he scarpered. My husband nearly went after him, but then I sed, “Oh let it be. We’ve taken bigger losses before this – and we’ve been cheated before – and we get thru all the same! God will look after us.” My husband looked at me a bit strange, because I don’t usually come over religious like that – I’m usually the practical one. But there you are. Somehow it just seemed on that day it was better to stay and listen to the preachers. Tho to be honest with you I can’t remember what they sed, only it was beautiful and it was all about God. I guess the priests must have sent them.)

In spite of his amazement that so great an adventure could be so little understood by someone in the midst of it, Lukas had been amused. And a little humbled. Here was he, preparing his documents for a sophisticated readership, and God had reminded him that God was just as concerned for the garrulous, scatter-brained wife of a small-time trader. He had put it under his belt for further reflection.

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Where to begin, and how to take in hand the story of the whole world’s salvation? With the risen Lord, with the one whose followers had seen him glorified? Or with Jesus of Nazareth crucified like a slave, his kingdom come to nothing in Jerusalem? With the teacher who went about Galilee showing the people, and showing his followers, the ways of God? Or with the story-teller and healer who gave hope to a suffering world? Or do you begin with the temple, that most sacred place in Israel, with scented incense and the smoke rising from the sacrificial fires? He was, he is, the Lord, and the very power of God ruling the world is spelled out in him, but how do you begin to get hold of the idea? Where do you begin to tell it so that people will understand?

The world needed to know it. From the hard-driven slave grumbling and complaining at his lot, to the poor forever cheated by the powerful, to the governor making arrangements for a whole province, to the rich man at his ease in selfish luxury, they all needed to know the power of God in Jesus, salvation in the gift of God from the sucking quagmire of pain, frustration, sin and fear that their lives have become. For here is the glory of God, the peace of the world, the hand that touches and heals; here is the Lord under whose gentle rule the world will find its salvation.

He was gazing out again over the house tops, over the wharves and the busy harbour and out over the wide sea. But now he saw none of it, for a vision had taken hold of his imagination. In his mind's eye it was nite, a still nite on a Judean hillside where shepherds were resting, sleeping, but half awake for their flocks even as they slept. It was a mild spring nite, but with a touch of cold, for it is the hill country near the town of Bethlehem, where there are many pastures. A quiet and uneventful nite, until suddenly the shepherds are facing a messenger from God who tells them that here in their own neighborhood, in the company of animals like their own sheep, the Lord and Savior of Israel is being born. They hear and they are amazed. In this nite, the hand of God has moved and the world is changed for ever. And in the sky and all around them, angels, mighty in the greatness and praise of God, fill the nite with glory, announcing the joy that has come to the shepherds and to the whole of their people:

“Glory to God in the highest realms of heaven. And on earth peace to the people, blessed in the friendship of God.”

The physician took up his pen.