

The boy walked along the river-road lost in thought. Every time his sandals hit the powder-dry earth of the roadway, a tiny dust storm exploded. So the progress of the father, his son and their little train of plodding donkeys could be traced in a line of tiny dust clouds that hung low along the river-road where they had passed. The boy stopped and turned around for a moment to look back toward the river. But a bend in the red dirt of the roadway now hid the wide Jordan River from sight. So, the boy turned back to follow his father and their three donkeys as they trudged homeward in the late afternoon sunlight.

It had started out to be a normal trip to market like any other. The day before, the man and his son had left their home south of the city known by many as the City of Palms. Others called the large town a few miles north of their farm Jericho. And near the end of each month, the man would pack large wicker frames with the produce of the farm: vegetables and cheese during the summer months, olives, and dates in the autumn, and large sacks of fleecy white wool in the spring. In the first gray of early morning, by the fickle light of a tallow lamp the farmer and his son would strap the wicker frames on the backs of the farm's three sturdy little donkeys. Then they would start westward toward the Jordan River, merging into the early traffic along the river-road south toward the Capital. After spending the night with a kinsman in the city, they would return north and homeward along the same route, the donkeys now laden with sacks of flour, salt and other staples for their home.

But this would not be exactly the same as any other market day. Because a little over halfway home, along the river-road the boy and his father had come to a weird sight. A large crowd had clotted a bend in the road by the bank of the river. And standing in the river was one of the strangest men the boy had ever seen. He had flowing brown hair and a beard of the same color which reached to his waist. And he wore not a tunic of wool or cotton, but a strange baggy garment belted at the waist, a kind of robe that seemed to be made of fabric the color of a camel's coat. And he was taking people one by one who came up to him, and plunging them down into the waters of the river, crying out "Repent and rejoice for your sins are forgiven!" And when the man had finished baptizing all those who stood by, he came up out of the river and began telling the people about someone who was coming. Someone was coming who would restore the Kingdom of David. Someone who would make peace return to the land and make everyone love each other and love God.

The farmer, his son and the three donkeys reached home just as the sun was sinking into western Judean hillside. The boy's mother embraced her husband, and then she reached down and hugged her son to her, ruffling his curly, dark hair. "Go and see to the donkeys. Then hurry and wash. The bread is warm, and I'm just now getting ready to light the Sabbath candle."

Later that night, after the boy blew out the flame from the oil lamp near his bed, as he nestled into the darkness of the quiet house, he was still thinking about the words of the strange man. The boy understood about restoring the Kingdom of David. Why, this was something Rabbi Ithzac often talked about. He knew from his lessons with the other boys of the village that the great Prophet Isaiah had promised that someone would one day come who would restore to Israel her Kingdom. He knew that one day, Go would free his county from the Roman soldiers, who even that very morning had been striding arrogantly through the market stalls. And the boy supposed that a mighty King who could come and defeat the Romans could also bring peace to the land and make it so that wars were never fought again.

But, that strange man in the camel-colored robe had also promised that the mighty king who was coming to free Israel would make everyone love each other, and make them love God too. Now, how was anyone going to do that?

As he lay there in the darkness, his brow wrinkled down into a frown. Even the mightiest king with the most potent army, even the greatest general of all time couldn't make people love each other. I mean, nobody in the whole village loves the Roman soldiers. No matter how powerful and great a king you are, you still can't make people love each other, can you?

Oh sure, the boy thought, I love Mother and Father, but that's easy. I've seen how hard Mother works so that we have a safe, comfortable home. And I've seen Father come in from the fields some nights so tired he could barely stand up, just so we have enough food to last through the winter. I mean, when someone like Mother or Father does all that for you because they love you, it's easy to love them back. But, if they asked me to love the Roman soldiers, well, I just couldn't do that. Nobody could.

I guess if someone wanted me to love everyone else and to love God too, that person who got me to love even my enemies would have to be someone really special. That person would have to be someone who had done something for me so big, so wonderful that I just couldn't refuse him, not for anything in the world. I guess, if someone did something like that for me, I would be willing to do anything he asked me, just because he loved me so much. But, I'm not sure I would feel that way about a mighty king or a great general.

In fact – the boy thought on - in fact, I suppose this incredibly special type of person really **couldn't** be a mighty king or a fearsome general. Because this special man who could make everyone love each other and make everyone love God, this special person would have to be someone that nobody was afraid of. He would have to be someone who everyone could understand, someone who was willing to go anywhere, not just to palaces or large wealthy houses, but someone who would go to the poor people and to the hospitals and even to the prisons.

So, the little boy thought. He supposed this special person really **couldn't** be the son of a fearful King or an awesome general. This person would have to be incredibly loving. Yes, the most loving person in the whole wide world. But at the same time, he would have to be someone born to a normal family in a modest home. Maybe the son of a farmer or a shopkeeper or a carpenter. That would be the only way that everyone could get close to this special being, if he were born and raised in a humble family.

The little boy scratched his head in the dark and thought a little more about what kind of man this very special person might be who would make everyone love God and love each other. And, as he finally drifted off to sleep, in the quiet darkness of his bedroom, the boy smiled and thought, "Yes, that kind of special person, a Lord of Love for everyone, the man who always loved, and never hated and forgave everyone, that kind of man would be very special indeed. Yes, perhaps if that kind of person loved me so very much, and asked me to love everyone, maybe I could do it. Yes, maybe I could.

A Special Person (Reflections on Lk.3:7-14): "He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross" (Phil.2.8 - NRSV). Paul understood the key human character trait that Jesus manifested during His earthly walk with us. So I'm not talking about human qualities here, for certainly the most important quality that Jesus had to give us was His love, faithful to the very end, which he finally poured out for us completely on Golgotha. As far as a "descriptor" of His human character, Paul understood humility as the primary characteristic that made Jesus the man he was. This is an astoundingly powerful truth to grasp.

If the Fall of Man was brought about largely because of pride – that is, man’s choosing his own prideful desires for his life over those which God laid before him – then the “anti-venom” for this cosmic blunder could only be in the form of absolute humility. Since we in our fallen nature could never be sufficiently humble so to make sufficient amends for this original sin in God’s eyes, Jesus had to be perfectly humble for us, in our stead.

This is a key part of what Paul means when he instructs us to put on Christ (see Romans 13:14). Tom Wright talks convincingly about this in his beautiful little book *Paul for Everyone* when describing the “full armor of God”¹ (see Eph.6:). And Paul introduces the concept of clothing ourselves in Christ by beginning his letter to the Ephesians with the repeated assurance that we Christians are “in Christ.”² Paul becomes even clearer in his statement about our union with Christ in the next chapter of that same letter when he proclaims “For we are what he has made us, created **in Christ Jesus** for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life” (Eph.2:10 – NRSV). Surely it is this union with the Lord, this state of being “in Christ” that makes it possible for the committed Christian to practice true humility, a humbling way of life that can only come from an intimate walk with The Lord.

It was only by this astonishing humility that Jesus was able to offer salvation to all people of good will and lead them back to The Father. That’s what ***A Special Person*** is meant to explore. Never in the history of the world has there been another so vastly powerful human being who was nonetheless totally devoted to being a humble servant of love. It is staggering that the very Creator of the universe would put off His royal majesty, walk humbly among us turning none away who would follow Him, and finally wash clean our feet with his own hands, and our very souls with His most precious blood. It was the most astonishing event that had ever occurred in the history of the universe. It still is!



Verrocchio's *Baptism of Christ by John the Baptist*. Can't you see a family resemblance between Jesus and his cousin John?

¹ Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone* (London/Louisville: SPCK/John Knox, 2002) 72-76.

² Wright 6.