

The Orphan Who Was Son of the King

March 27, 2011

Texts: Mark 9:33-37

Growing up an orphan is tough for anyone, but especially when all your cousins you grew up with were older than you. My uncle already had a big family of his own when my father died. I was very small, but I do remember being the only child and how mother loved me, just me. Father had gone off to work one day and never came back. We never knew what happened to him, but I have a pretty good idea, though; someone said he had an argument with a Roman soldier. That left me and mother alone and she was expecting another baby. Uncle Isaac took us in, but it was crowded and hard to make ends meet with all those mouths to feed. Mother always told me, "Jake, it will be fine; God will provide." When the baby came she had a real hard time because we kids heard her scream a lot, then she was quiet, but we never heard the baby cry. When they let me see her I remember she was so cold, not like she was when she would hold me close and sing sweet bedtime songs to me.

Life got a lot harder after that. My cousins always reminded me that I was an orphan and they were the only "real children" in the house. Everyone else in Capernaum knew I was an orphan too and treated me like one. I always got the leftover scraps from the meals and the old worn out clothes. They gave me the chores the other kids didn't want to do, like keeping the gutter moving with a stick and washing dirty feet and shoes. I got pretty good at swatting flies with that stick. It came in handy when the bullies chased me singing, "**Orphan, orphan, you're a stinky orphan.**" I didn't mind always smelling bad; they left me alone most of the time. When I had to take a bath I was always **last** in the water. Guess why?

As I got older, I learned where I could go to get a few extra scraps of bread and sometimes some fish too. There was this house where a fisherman named Simon lived with his wife and her mother and I could usually get some good leftovers. The mother was real nice. Once she told me about when the teacher named Jesus came home with Simon one day. She had been sick for a week and was so hot and tired that she couldn't get out of bed to cook or do anything else; she felt useless. When Jesus heard she was sick he came right in the room and took her hand and raised her up and she was instantly well. She was so thankful that she always cooked nice meals for him sharing the leftovers with us kids in the street. I was hanging out over by Simon's house one evening hoping for something to eat when the teacher and Simon and a bunch of his friends came home. They were whispering and fussing amongst themselves about who was most important and would get to sit next

to the teacher, but quiet so that he couldn't tell what they were saying. They weren't just kidding around either. I was listening through the window, and it got real quiet when Jesus asked them what they had been talking about. It was like he really already knew though, because he started talking about who was the most important. I thought I heard him say something like, "The one who wants to be number 1 must be last, like a servant." I couldn't believe my ears, so I stood up on a box outside the window so I could hear better and see in. He said it again and that time I heard it real well, "The first must be last and be a servant to everyone else." It was like he was talking about me. I was always the least and the last kid; the one who had to serve everyone else. Did he mean that they had to become like me? That sounded crazy to me and I guess it must have to them too.

Just then, he got up and stepped over to the window where I was peeking in and reached out to me, but real nice and gentle. I wasn't used to that; everyone was always swatting me away. But, he was different. He held out both hands as if to pick me up under my arms. I didn't know him, but for some reason I felt I could trust him, so I let him. He picked me up and brought me through the window and held me close with both his strong arms. That was the most amazing feeling...I hadn't felt that since my father held me when I was real little. I sure have missed those hugs. Now, this stranger was hugging me when no one else would even let me get close. Then he said something I will never forget in a million years; he said, "When you welcome even a child *like this* because of me, you welcome me. And when you welcome me, you welcome the one who sent me." (John 9:37 CEV)

I wasn't quite sure what he meant by that, but it seemed to catch the men off guard like he did me when he picked me up. It got very quiet in that room then. You know what he did next? He sat me down right next to him, dirty feet and all, like I was his own grown-up son, and let me eat with him and all the big men. Kids never got to eat with grown men. He shared his own bread with me and let me drink from his own cup. That **NEVER HAPPENS with a kid, much less one like me!** And, boy was that food good. I saw the older lady peeking around the corner and she was smiling real big at me. And, right then, I felt like I had never felt before, like I was **SOMEBODY**, not just an orphan kid off the street. **I felt like I was the son of the King of Israel.**

After that night, though not much changed with how people treated me. To them I was still a worthless orphan, but **after my uncle heard Jesus teaching he was different.** He would always say, "I have met the true King of Israel." He was different toward me, too. He quit hitting me when I was in his way or didn't do what I was supposed to do. He even tried to get my cousins to be nicer to me...I'm still waiting for that! You know what? When I was ten my Uncle Isaac paid for me to go to Synagogue school and learn to read and write Hebrew. I loved it. I studied real hard and got pretty

good at saying the words and singing the prayers. Every day, the old rabbi would call role and always say the boy's name, son of...and then say his father's name, but when he came to me he would say, "Jakeniah, whose your father?" and everyone would laugh and make fun of me. After a couple of years it was time for everyone's *bar mitzvah*. Everyone was inviting each other to their parties, everyone except me. I wondered, would I have a *bar mitzvah*? It was up to a relative to "adopt" an orphaned relative to give him his ceremony. Uncle Isaac had never adopted me, just gave me a roof over my head, some food, and old clothes.

One day the rabbi called uncle in to talk to him and told him I couldn't have a *bar mitzvah* because I didn't have a father. That was when Uncle Isaac did something I never dreamed he would do, he pulled me up close to his side, placed his hand on my head and the rabbi said, "Today, Jakeniah is your son." But, Uncle stopped him and said, **"No, he is a son of the King."** I couldn't believe my ears. Was it real? Did he really adopt me? I was shocked and didn't know what to say, and then the rabbi said, "Now, he has a father." And he looked at me and said, "Now you may have your *bar mitzvah* and become a man. You are Jakeniah, son of Isaac." But, Uncle Isaac always called me his "Little Prince" from then on.

A lot has happened since then and I have changed a lot. Jesus started something when he was with us that continues to this day. He was put to death, but he now lives in my heart and the hearts of many others. Now, they come to hear **ME** teach Torah and tell how Jesus changed everything. He opened heaven for everyone, no matter how small or poor or fatherless. He said, "The first must be last, but he also said, the last would be first." I love to tell how he picked me up that day from the dirt and muck of the streets and set me down right beside him sharing his food with me, like I was his own son. That is why I have so many children. My wife and I had none ourselves, but we are blessed with a great family anyway, many strong sons and beautiful daughters. They all were once like I was, orphaned, but, now they have a father and a mother, us. But, whenever anyone asks whose child one is, I always say, **"He is a son of the King or she is a daughter of the King."**

How about you, are you a son or daughter of the King? He wants you to be. You can be today. But, you have to quite trying to be first and have others serve you. Jesus has to be first in your life; you have to serve him by serving others. You have to let him be your father and you start living as his child, filled with his Spirit and his love. It doesn't matter what you may have done, how dirty you may feel, who your family is, or how far you have strayed. There is nothing that can keep him from loving you just as you are, right where you are. Let him pick you up and set you down right next to him and you get to eat his bread and drink from his cup, and **be the son or daughter of the King.**