

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES: TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATION

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Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey. "Jesus found an ass and sat upon it, as is written: 'Fear no more, O daughter Zion; see, your king comes, seated upon an ass's colt'" (Jn 12:14-15). Why? Simply, because it was customary for people to travel on donkeys, camels, horses, by boat and by foot. As we journey back in time, we will explore the forms of transportation and communication used during Jesus' lifetime.



"Jesus was born during the time the Roman Empire had expanded throughout the Mediterranean region, creating a network of land and sea routes used for transportation and communication" (Nazareth Village, 2008). Traveling was an arduous, challenging task so people only traveled when necessary. A day's journey would have consisted of possibly ten to thirty miles a day on foot. From the Gospels we know that Jesus traveled mostly by foot, "they were on the road going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking on ahead of them..." (Mk 10:32). "An ancient traveler would need to know the locations of wells or springs of water" (Middletown Bible Church). Often they would arrive at a spring only to find that it had dried up and had to go on without water. Hence, we hear Jesus say more than once "...but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (Jn 4:14).

Donkeys, often the animal of choice for travel, were also preferred by kings when approaching their kingdom. "These sturdy little animals could climb hills with ease and walk on rough stony ground" (American Catholic, 1996-2013). Many Old Testament figures used them to move about, an example can be found in Numbers 22:21 "...Balaam arose, saddled his ass and went off with the princes of Moab". People used other animals for transportation, such as camels and horses. Camels, while stubborn, could travel for long periods of time without water. "Horses were used by the army and rarely by the ordinary traveler since they could be commandeered by any soldier" (American Catholic, 1996-2013). Like most of the common, working people, Jesus and his disciples journeyed on foot.

Traveling, whether on foot or by animal, often meant facing certain dangers. "There was the threat of heat and exhaustion, cold and hunger, peril from wild animals (lions and wild boars were still found in this part of the world at the time of the Crusades). Bandits and brigands were a constant hazard" (American Catholic, 1996-2013). Hence, the reason people often traveled in caravans, "Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when He became twelve, they went up *there* according to the custom of the Feast; and as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. But His parents were unaware of it, but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and went a day's journey; and they *began* looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances" (Lk 2:41-44).

By the time Jesus was born, there were some roads in place, "the Romans were builders and roads were their passion. Using large stones for paving came in with Emperor Augustus. Roman commerce and the military depended on this infrastructure, and paved roads leading out from the forum in Rome connected every major city" (American Catholic, 1996-2013). Curators, (Julius Caesar was at one time a Curator) were the ones who maintained the roads, often using money from the local villagers or communities for repairs. Sometimes they would use some of their own money, either way, many disliked them the curators.

Another form of transportation during these times was by ship or boat. However this form of travel was also extremely difficult. Ships were often overcrowded and infested, "One had to bring everything one would require, including food, water, bedding and an overcoat. Pompey, the great Roman general, rid the Mediterranean of pirates, but he could not rid ships of rats. Passengers had to beat off these creatures to keep them from attacking their food" (American Catholic, 1996-2013). Can one imagine the Apostles traveling on ships? Clearly their love for Jesus was more than enough for them to withstand such conditions. Would they have touched others lives on those ships? Would their witness have been enough to draw others to Christ? "And embarking in an Adramyttian ship, which was about to sail to the regions along the coast of Asia, we put out to sea accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica" (Acts 27:2). We read in the Gospel that Jesus often traveled by boat, likely a fisherman's boat - smaller than ships. He regularly cross(ed) lakes and traveled on the Sea of Galilee.

Throughout the Gospels, we see Jesus moving from village to village, walking and meeting people along the way, "He journeyed from one town and village to another, preaching and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God" (Lk 8:1). He would have met foreigners traveling for trade and commerce. They would have been so impressed by their encounter with Jesus that they would have gone on in their travels or returned to their homes speaking of Jesus, in essence, spreading the Good News. We know that Jesus traveled and we read in the Gospel stories about specific people he spoke to or the masses of people He fed or those that He cured, etc...but what about those moments not accounted for in the Gospels? What would those nights out in the wild have been like for Him and His disciples? Did people come to speak to Him privately? Did He welcome them? What conversations took place between Him and His disciples during those journeys? The way that Jesus lived and interacted with others would have shown the Apostles how they were now called to live.

Jesus not only taught by example, but he taught with words. He preached, in synagogues, on mountains, in crowds, "On another occasion he began to teach by the sea. A very large crowd gathered around him so that he got into a boat on the sea and sat down. And the whole crowd was beside the sea on land. And he taught them at length in parables..." (Mk 4:1-2). "All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable" (Matt 13:34). "The Aramaic of Biblical times was the common language in Palestine, and was most likely the language that Jesus himself spoke" (Wise Geek, 2003-2013). There "were four primary languages spoken by people in Biblical times: Latin, Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew" (Wise Geek, 2003-2013). The variety of languages is indicative of the differences in culture, ethnicity, class and education of the people of this time.

There were a number of forms of written communication, such as "parchment, rock, and animal skin were all used to convey messages" (Religious Product News, 2013). People enjoyed this form of communication because they could refer back to it and share it with other. This written form of communication allowed people to have a record and to more easily share information with others. However, "the disadvantage to this method of communication was the lack of widespread availability. Reproduction was time-consuming and susceptible to human error" (Religious Product News, 2013). The more common method of communication was for a person to stand on a rock or something that elevated them and then they would yell or speak in a loud voice the message they wanted to share. Jesus would have used this method of communication. This, of course, meant that people would have to gather around and stand close so they could hear. Jesus looked people straight in the eye, establishing a relationship.

"One of the first things Jesus did when He began His ministry on earth was to call 12 disciples, 12 men whom He would mentor" (Religious Product News, 2013). The disciples knew him intimately. Jesus gave us the example of relationship, "by interacting with the disciples, creating personal connections with each of them in such a way that they would go on to tell His story for all to hear" (Religious Product News, 2013). People who know you are more likely to listen to you and get your message across. "The words themselves are strong, yes, but when conveyed by voice with tone, they are magnified. Utilizing multiple senses, Jesus shared His message; he used sight, sound, and touch when speaking to people. He was compelling, and His voice gave His Word greater impact" (Religious Product News, 2013).

Jesus healed many. "We notice in the Bible that every time Jesus healed a person, He spoke. He knew that people needed to hear His voice just as much as they needed healing" (Religious Product News, 2013). He did not want to just preach to the people, people often get tired of listening, but rather He wanted to speak to their hearts. To move them in the depths of their souls, words alone were not enough - He performed miracles. "After he left the synagogue, he entered the house of Simon. Simon's mother-in-law was afflicted with a severe fever, and they interceded with him about her. He stood over her, rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up immediately and waited on them" (Lk4:38-39). Sometimes, something concrete, a sign, was needed as evidence of His words - not because His words were in vain but rather because of the hardness of their hearts.

As news of Jesus continued to spread, people were talking about the healings He had done - can we not imagine people standing around the village, whispering and gossiping about Him? But He is wise and even this was a way of spreading the Good News. Jesus spoke to many foreigners on His journeys, the traveler who unknowingly spoke to God or those that were moved, changed or transformed by His mere presence, never to be the same again. There were some who might have grasped the immensity of the person of Jesus but were inadequate at communicating it, some who felt something different in His presence and thought it was their imagination and did nothing, and some who only knew they had to tell others about Jesus not understanding why.

Transportation and communication were key elements in the way Jesus and his disciples were able to share the Good News. After Jesus' death, the apostles traveled and taught about everything they had seen and learned. By God's grace they were able to speak to people from many different parts of the world, "now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem...they were confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language" (Act 2:5-6). They used the only way they knew how to reach the people, "then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and proclaimed to them..." (Acts

2:14). Jesus calls us today to use the tools we have to tell others about His love.

"Oh, that today you would hear his voice: 'Harden not your hearts'" (Hebrews 4:7b). We need to hear His voice, ponder His words, take them into our hearts and then give them back to others. We are to reveal to others the love of God that dwells in our hearts.

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