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I hope you enjoy my story.

CARLEY, AGE 8



Stranger at the Well

by

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Josh walked through the hot, dry, dusty streets of Jerusalem and headed for the livery stable. His oversize leather sandals flopped loudly with each step. Josh was smaller than his other friends who were seven-years-old. In fact, he was the same size as Jordan, his twin sister. He didn't like that.

The brilliant morning sun already promised another 100-degree day for the deserts of his Israeli homeland. In the distance he could see his friends walking toward the splendid gardens of the Mount of Olives.

Josh approached a crowd of people gathered near the well at the center of town. He could hear a man's strong voice coming from the center of the group, but he couldn't see who it was. A hundred adults sat on the dusty ground or stood quietly and surrounded the stranger, seemingly fascinated by him. Josh's

curiosity drew him closer. But as he got nearer a few adults waved him away. “This isn’t for children,” one of them said. “Go somewhere and play.” Josh felt rejected and walked away.

The livery stable came into Josh’s view. He entered through the dark wide entrance and called out for his friend. “David? David, where are you?”

“Back here, Josh,” came a boy’s voice from the rear of the livery. “I’ll be out in a minute.”

Soon David emerged from the livery and brushed his hands together to signify he was done. “So, what do you want to do today,?” he asked.

“I don’t know. Play ball. Hide-and-seek. Jordan and Ruthie went with the other kids to the Mount of Olives to play.” What Josh really wanted to do was see the stranger at the well. Then Josh suggested, “There’s some new guy talking to a bunch of people down by the well. I tried to see him, but I got chased away.”

“Oh, I heard about him. My dad said the stranger claims to be the Son of God. Weird, huh?”

Josh and David decided to play catch, so they headed for the shaded trees at the Mount of Olives just north of Jerusalem.

As the boys reached the magnificent gardens Josh saw his twin sister Jordan. She was sitting alone in a peaceful shaded cove and was surrounded by tall flowers bursting with brilliant colors. Her arms were wrapped around her knees, and her long black hair covered the shoulders of her white robe. Josh knew that his sister was at her “private place” as she called it. This was where Jordan often sat quietly and watched the other children play.

“Want to go hiking with us?” Josh asked her.

“Sure,” Jordan replied, and she followed David and her brother into the cool shaded woods. Soon many of their friends caught up to them and joined in the walk. Later that morning the children sat in a circle in the tall grass and talked and laughed and played.

“Hey, Jordan?” Josh asked. “Have you heard about that stranger in town?”

“You mean the one over by the well?” she asked.

“Yeah. Have you heard about him?”

“I’ve heard people talk. They’ve called him a teacher, a prophet, even the Son of God. I wonder who he is.”

“I tried to get close to him this morning, to see what he looked like, but I got chased away,” Josh complained.

“Let’s go see him now,” Jordan proclaimed fearlessly. It always bothered Josh that his frail-looking twin sister seemed to have more courage than he had. Josh, Jordan, David and several of their friends meandered toward the center of Jerusalem.

* * *

Hundreds of people were gathered at the well and surrounded the stranger. The children could hear his voice.

“When your brother or sister sins against you forgive him, forgive her,” the stranger taught in a voice filled with authority and compassion.

“But how many times should we forgive?” someone asked.

“As many times as you would wish to be forgiven of your sins. As you forgive others, so will my Father forgive you,” he answered. Many grumbled.

The children stood on their toes behind the gathering and tried to see the stranger. Jordan climbed up the side of a parked wagon and looked over everyone.

Just then, one of the adults noticed the children. Grownups began yelling at them. “Hey! What are you kids doing here? Go away! This is for adults. Go somewhere and play. Get out of here!”

Josh and his friends bowed their heads in rejection and began walking away. Before Jordan climbed down from the cart she got a glimpse of the stranger. He looked at her and for a moment their eyes locked. He smiled at her. Though he didn't say anything she immediately liked him. She felt as if she knew him. Jordan climbed down from the cart and joined her friends. She wanted so badly to meet the stranger. She didn't know why, she just knew she had to, though it was difficult with the adults keeping kids away from him.

* * *

Later that day as Jordan stood across the street from the Temple, she saw the stranger walking toward the holy place. She gathered all her courage, crossed the street and headed straight for the Temple entrance. She was hoping her path would bring her close to him so she might meet him.

In front of the sacred building were endless rows of tables and chairs. Men were bickering, bartering, and buying and selling everything imaginable. On each

table, scrolls and tablets were neatly arranged, and coins were stacked like little towers. The noise from the yelling and dealing was deafening.

Jordan made it to the main entrance of the Temple and watched as the stranger got closer. When he came to the first table he stopped. Jordan could sense that he was enraged by the sight.

“What are you doing to my Father’s House?” he roared. The clamoring crowd grew quiet. Everyone ceased their dealings and glared at him. “What do you think you are doing?” His mighty voice echoed like rolling thunder. “This is the House of the Living God! How dare you mock Him?” Still, no one spoke. Jordan could see that the stranger was furious, and she became scared.

“How dare you!” he yelled at the crowd which seemed shocked and dumbstruck by his intrusion. He then grabbed the first table and violently pushed it over. Men ran as their scrolls, tablets and coins went flying into the dusty street.

Jordan wanted to run too but she was so frightened her legs wouldn’t move. She stood like a stone statue at the Temple entrance and stared at the stranger who was upturning table after table and throwing chairs, benches, scrolls and money into the street. He came closer and closer to her. Further down the

line huge, powerful men stood their ground, their arms were crossed in defiance as if they were daring the stranger to approach them.

Jordan was terrified. The stranger came nearer. He continued yelling and pushing tables over, hurling things into the street. Money was scattered everywhere. "This is my Father's House!" he shouted. Jordan watched in amazement as the big men who were standing cross-armed at their tables suddenly abandoned their positions and bolted. They seemed to sense that their strength was no match for this stranger's fury.

"This is a House of Prayer!" the stranger thundered. Then he said sadly and softly, "But you have made it into a den of thieves." The stranger held out his arms, looked toward heaven and slowly shook his head as if he were asking for forgiveness for what he had seen or for what he had just done.

When he turned, the billowing sleeve of his robe brushed softly across Jordan's face. She didn't know what to expect. Was the angry man going to push her out of the way too? Was he going to throw her into the street? She closed her eyes and braced herself. Although Jordan knew she hadn't done anything wrong, she was paralyzed with fear. She felt her body shivering. She swallowed

hard and prayed for the man to go away. "Please, God, help me!" she prayed in her heart. Then there was silence.

When she opened her eyes, she found herself staring into the face of the stranger. He was down on one knee and he was smiling. She could feel his eyes peering into the most secret places of her heart.

"What's your name?" he asked in a tender, friendly voice.

Jordan gathered all her strength and tried to answer. "Jordan," she barely whispered.

"Hello, Jordan. My name is Jesus."

The stranger gently put his strong hand on her shoulder, and she closed her eyes again. She felt a cool, peaceful breeze flowing through her frail body from her feet to her head. Her fear instantly vanished. She felt peace and happiness, even joy. She made herself treasure every part of the glorious feeling so she could remember it forever. Suddenly she couldn't feel the stranger's hand on her shoulder. When she opened her eyes, he was gone.

* * *

Jordan spent the rest of the afternoon at her “secret place” in the Mount of Olives. She sat with her arms wrapped around her knees, and she replayed in her mind the incredible experience she had in front of the Temple when she met the stranger who called himself Jesus. Jordan didn’t notice when her brother approached.

“So, there you are!” Josh said, startling his sister who was deep in thought. “Everyone has been looking for you. We heard that you met the stranger at the Temple. What happened?”

Jordan glanced up at her brother. “Come on,” she boldly commanded. “Get the other kids. We’re going to the well.”

“We can’t go there,” Josh protested. “They’ll chase us away.”

“Get the other kids and meet me at the well,” she ordered. Jordan got up and walked toward town as if she were on a mission.

* * *

When Jordan and her friends arrived at the well where the stranger was talking to the people, she heard adults asking, “Who is the greatest in the

Kingdom of Heaven?" Others added, "Yes, who is most important? Who among us has the best chance of getting into heaven?"

Just then, someone noticed the group of children, and the grownups began yelling. "Oh, no, the kids are back! Go home! Get out of here! You don't belong here! Haven't you been told to stay away?"

Josh looked at his sister. "Come on, Jordan. Let's go." The children turned to leave but Jordan stood firm.

"You kids get out of here," an adult yelled. "Go home! Leave now. Are you deaf?"

Jordan looked at the stranger. He looked at her, and he smiled. He held up his hand.

"Wait!" ordered the stranger. "Do not send them away. Allow the children to come to me." He motioned with his arms to clear a path for the children to approach him. He held out his hand to them and Jordan stepped toward him.

Josh grabbed her. "Where are you going? Are you crazy?"

“It’s okay, Josh.” Jordan looked at the other kids. “Follow me,” she told them. The adults stepped aside and cleared a path as Jordan led the band of children up to the stranger.

“Hello, Jordan,” the stranger greeted as he took her hand. “It’s nice to see you again.”

The adults started complaining that the children had no business being there, that they should go home.

“Silence,” the stranger commanded in the same thundering voice Jordan remembered hearing earlier that day at the Temple. “Do you want to know who among you is the most important? Do you want to know who my Father considers to be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?”

The crowd yelled, “Yes! Tell us! Who is the greatest?”

The stranger whispered into Jordan’s ear. “Hold on.” As he picked her up, Jordan wrapped her arms around his neck. The surprised crowd gazed in silence.

The stranger looked around his audience as he held Jordan close to him. “Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?” He motioned to the other

children. “These are the greatest. Unless you become as these little children, you will never see the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Again the crowd complained. “That’s impossible! What do they know? They’re just children. How can that be?”

The stranger shook his head. “I’m telling you the truth. Do you know why these children are the greatest in the eyes of my Father?” The crowd was speechless, waiting for an answer. “They have something many adults have lost. They have humility. With humility you can find wisdom.”

“But they’re just children,” someone yelled out.

He looked into Jordan’s eyes, smiled, and looked back at the crowd. “If you humble yourselves like this child, you will be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. If you welcome a child like this in my name, you welcome me.” The stranger looked toward Heaven then back to the people. He spoke softly, “Do not look down on these little ones, for each one has an angel in Heaven. And every day those angels see my Father’s face.”

As the crowd mumbled, the stranger gently put Jordan down. He knelt on one knee, held her hands in his, and looked into her eyes.

“Jordan,” he whispered softly so only she could hear. “Remember this day. Remain humble. Pray to my Father every day in my name. Ask Him for wisdom. And one day I will see you again . . . in Heaven.”

Jordan closed her eyes and hugged the stranger with all her might. As he embraced her, she again felt the cool, peaceful, comforting breeze flowing through her. Then she felt a kiss on her forehead.

* * *

The next day the stranger at the well was gone. As Jordan sat quietly and alone at her private place in the Mount of Olives, she remembered all that had happened to her just the day before. She locked every word, every feeling, and every detail in the most private and secret place in her heart. She prayed just as the stranger had told her. And she knew that one day she would see him again . . . in Heaven.

The End

Based on the book of Matthew.