

MERCY IN AMERICA

BY

Michael E. Fulkerson

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CHAPTER ONE

Lane reached the age of decision. It was 1734, and he was thinking about a journey.

He lived east of the Mediterranean city of Joppa, right there between the sea and the mountains.

Tamar is his mother. She'd tell him stories about Israel's glory days, a time, when God moved and walked in their midst. He liked her stories.

Lane still recalled many things about his father, a proud Jewish man, a man from the tribe of Dan.

It was hard to get everything right, for his father had left home a long time ago. It was in the month of IYYAR, but it was three years ago.

IYYAR happens in the spring time.

Lane was proud of the fact that his parents gave him the same name as his father.

An ever present question remained upon his mind, as he stepped into the kitchen of the tiny house they lived in. So, he asked his mother about it.

"What do you suppose happened to him?" Lane spoke plainly to Tamar. Tamar finished chopping those few remaining vegetables. She scooped them into the soup kettle, and she addressed her son's question.

"Your father went to Joppa to see those Romanists, the people he spoke to, those folks from the north."

Tamar's eyes glazed over some, as she recited what she had seen.

"He was so certain about the prophets. But, I don't know."

Lane could see her tears and, looking into those beautiful, brown eyes, he listened.

"Come here!" He invited her into an embrace, an embrace to comfort them both. It was also on his mind that he was already much taller than her. He had reached the age of twelve.

"Have you decided?" Tamar muffled her words into her son's chest, and she cleared the remaining tears from her eyes onto his tunic. "You're a man now, and I can't stop you from talking to those people."

"You mean the priest from the Romanists?" He knew her answers before any came, for it wasn't their first conversation on the topic.

Wiping her eyes with the back of her hands now, Tamar confirmed it. "Yes, my son. They're not our people."

Lane found it impossible to meet the penetrating eyes of his mother. His hands were on her shoulders, a gesture much like the one his father had often used. It was how a man addressed a woman under his authority, ever so gentle, but still very much in command.

"I've looked over what Father left me. The prophets also speak of the gentile people." Lane made his case, or started on it.

"Maybe I shouldn't have allowed you to read them." It was an old argument for Tamar. "I could have kept them from you, or stopped you from going to the temple."

Lane knew full well that his mother was actually very pleased with his ability to read, and she also supported and encouraged him in his ability to speak and understand some of the other languages, the tongues of the northern clans. He smiled at her.

Then, Lane spoke. "You see God's promises too. You know Father was right about this." He came at her with a new approach. "The Lord came to save everybody, not just us, not only the chosen tribes of Israel."

"I'm going to the city with you tomorrow." It was the first time Tamar voiced her desire to him.

Taking his standard seat at the head of their table, Lane distracted himself with the aroma from the turnip soup.

"I'm only going to be gone until the new moon." He began to object to his mother's news. He secretly enjoyed the idea of being alone on this trip, a journey into the world as a fully grown man.

It upset him to ponder this change in his plans, but he didn't speak his thoughts aloud. Lane knew that Tamar wouldn't understand his rejection.

He chose to employ mercy. "Though the priest is only expecting me, Mother, I am pleased to share this mission with you."

She turned to face him. "What mission or duty are you talking about?"

"Father wouldn't have been gone this long, Mother, but that some odd thing altered his plans. You are far too beautiful." Lane blurted this out.

Tamar smiled once again. Her son's words tickled her.

Lane continued. "I mean to investigate what's happened to Father, no matter where the road leads me, no matter how long it takes."

"May the Lord be with you in this. And, may he guide your steps to where he wants you to be, as always."

Lane enjoyed hearing his mother's blessings. It was a habit of hers' and he decided to copy it.

"And may our Lord bless you, Mother. May he lead you back into the loving arms of my father."

She moved over to the table and began to serve up their soup.

"You are probably the best cook in the world." Lane led out the dinner conversation with this old compliment, one he had often heard his father use.

Tamar looked at her son and, feeling playful, she asked him, "And, you've sampled the cooking from around the world?"

Lane met her eyes, and this time his compliment was from the heart. "It's not so much that I've sampled the cooking from around the world, Mother. I don't have to. The Lord has provided me with a mother able to understand what I love."

Tamar knew a tear ran down her cheek, but she was very happy. The Lord had also blessed her with a very loving son.

CHAPTER TWO

Later on, Lane was standing outside. He wasn't really alone, for he was speaking to the Lord.

"Lord, I'm looking at the road you must have traveled more than a couple of times. I mean with your twelve disciples."

He pointed to the west and a split in the road, one direction going directly to Joppa, the other further south.

And, Lane inhaled the fragrances of spring. There were flowers, but the rain in the distance brought something extra into the experience. He could see the rain, too, but far away.

"You walked into that city so you must know it." He was still talking to the Lord.

Lane became very serious.

"I need your help, O Lord. I don't have the first clue in where I ought to begin. And, Mom's coming."

He watched some grey clouds moving across the valley. They were coming from the mountains behind him, to the east, and they were rolling toward Joppa, on their way to the sea.

Lane imagined it was the Lord's angel sent ahead to assist him, like in the days of the Exodus from Egypt.

"She's going to expect me to be a man. I don't even know how to do that, but I've got to do it."

More clouds were heading in the direction of the sea, and Lane willed them to be God's army, the Lord's troops sent to rout the enemies.

"Please, Lord. Show me pity and have mercy on me. I need you to guide my steps, for you are the Lord."

He gestured in every direction, dramatizing but serious about what he said.

"You created all these things, and I am just a boy."

There was hesitation. Then, Lane turned his eyes to Heaven.

"I am from the tribe of Dan, son of Jacob, son of Isaac, son of Abraham, your friend. Lord! You made him a promise. You said you'd give all these lands, all these things to his seed.

A wolf cried out in the hills.

"I know that it is you. You are the promised seed Lord. My father told me about you, how you came to live in the Galilee. You healed our sick and gave sight to the blind. You did everything the prophets said you would."

He fought with himself, looking for the right words and a way to express himself.

“Please come with us tomorrow, into that city. Show me where to go, and to whom I ought to speak. Lord. I want to know what happened to Father. Why he hasn’t returned.”

Suddenly, he was aware of the crickets and the frogs too. Both could be heard in the grass. He listened to their songs, or the noise nearly sounded like a song.

“Lord. You made the crickets and the frogs too. Thank you. Please help us tomorrow. Show us what to do and how to do it.”

Lane looked heavenward again.

“You are my only support, my salvation, and my guide in this world. Help me, Lord. If you help me, I will serve you for the rest of my life. Amen.”

Looking down the road now, Lane could see ZIBA; that was his cousin, a bit older than himself. The visit was expected.

“Going to the city tomorrow?” ZIBA asked, but he knew the answer. That’s the reason he had come.

Lane surprised his cousin. “Mom’s coming too.”

Expectation lit ZIBA’s eyes, but he was expecting some kind of an explanation.

The two boys shook hands, and they turned in the direction of Joppa. It was a lazy walk at sunset.

Lane supplied some of the desired details.

"She told me at supper. Guess she wants to know what happened to Father, why he left, or why he never came home."

ZIBA stopped, picked up a rock and tossed it into a field.

"I'm going to need you to look after things here." It was Lane talking. He had also stopped.

"How long will you be gone?" ZIBA knew that he would be explaining this to his own parents, because they were certain to ask.

Later, the two boys walked up the path toward Lane's barns. This is where he and his mother kept their few chickens and three goats.

Lane had made up his mind to be honest with ZIBA.

"I'm not really sure. I planned to be back by the new moon, but I can't even guess at what will happen."

Together, they did the chores, which meant they fed the animals and gave them water.

Lane was pretty much talking the whole time. "Father was going to speak to those Romanists, the people from the northern regions."

"You speak their language?" ZIBA flattered.

Lane continued. "I know enough to ask questions. Maybe I can understand the answers."

"That's a lot." ZIBA encouraged.

"It's enough." Lane agreed. "The Lord has been kind to me, and it's a gift. I mean a gift with languages. It comes easy."

The light was pretty much gone from the sky for, though it wasn't late, night had arrived.

The boys could hear the wolf crying out into the hills.

"Did you hear that male?" ZIBA questioned.

Lane smiled. "I been hearing him all day. And, I been praying to the Lord, too. That's probably what the wolf is doing."

ZIBA laughed at this. "What would a wolf pray about?"

"Same things I do." Lane responded. "He seeks the Lord's guidance, protection, provision, and love."

"You pray for guidance?" ZIBA inquired.

Lane stopped walking and faced his cousin.

"I did today. And, do you know why?"

ZIBA had to admit that he didn't. "You got me confused, but I want to understand."

Lane continued. "I was reading about Elisha. You know, the Lord's prophet."

"What about him?" ZIBA invited more.

That's exactly what Lane wanted ZIBA to do, so he continued. "It was, as you know, a long while back. David was long since dead. Our people had gone to worshipping idols, and the kingdom was under the Lord's curse, just like Moses said would happen."

ZIBA nodded, for he was following.

"Elisha had a servant." Lane began walking again, as he explained. "The guy's name was GEHAZI."

"I remember the story. It had to do with the ARAMEAN, the commander with leprosy." ZIBA guessed right.

"That's the one." Lane confirmed. NAAMAN came to the prophet ELISHA to be healed of his disease. And, he offers to give Elisha gifts."

ZIBA squinted, as one would do in trying to see or understand something difficult and strange.

Lane continued. "Elisha said, no!"

ZIBA smiled. "I'd have said yes."

"That's what most people would do." Lane lectured. "But, I'm thinking about something else Elisha said to GEHAZI, after his servant had gone after the commander, hoping to receive some kind of gift from him."

ZIBA picked up there and tried to explain the story. "Yeah. GEHAZI told the commander some story and received both coin and suits of clothing."

Lane corrected him. "What GEHAZI involved himself in, amounts to lies. He told the ARAMEAN a fable about traveling brothers and, when Elisha asked him later what he had done, he told another lie, in saying that he had gone nowhere."

ZIBA remembered that part. "Elisha said something like: 'I was with you in spirit and saw you.'"

Lane agreed. "He said that, but he said something else, too. He said that this is not the time to receive gifts, or to be receiving them. He listed examples, but pretty much included all worldly things."

"Worldly things?" ZIBA didn't quite understand.

"That's the thing I was praying about." Lane explained.
ZIBA was still confused. "You asked for worldly things?"

Lane shook his head, and he stopped walking. "No. That's just it. I find that I don't really want them. I'm going to Joppa looking into what happened to Father." He paused, then started them back toward the house.

"Don't stop talking now!" ZIBA walked alongside.

Lane gestured with his hands, as a dramatist would, but he kept talking. His hands worked to expand and broaden the topic.

"I'll try to put it into words." Lane offers.

"Yes. Try!" ZIBA's words encouraged.

"I find myself feeling totally at odds of the place I find myself in. I want to see Joppa and know what happened to Father. But, I want to hear God's voice. That's what's important to me. I asked Him to watch my back and to show me the truth. Now, I have to pay attention."

"You think God will help you out?" ZIBA asks an honest question.

"It's His nature to be merciful. I think I can count on support from the Lord." Lane let his cousin know what he believed.

Full circle now, they made it back to the path leading to the tiny house Lane shared with his mother. But, there was a wagon in the yard and somebody else was in the kitchen.

Lane's uncle MAHLI could be seen through the kitchen window. This visit wasn't common at all.

CHAPTER THREE

Lane led ZIBA into the tiny kitchen, now lit by oil lamps. He offered his right hand to his uncle.

“May the Lord bless you for showing us the kindness of this visit, Uncle. Greetings!”

Lane could see concern written on the face of his mother, but he addressed his uncle. “What’s the matter?”

It had to involve the uncle, or why this visit? That was the way Lane reasoned it out. This was silent, though, in his own head.

MAHLI responded. “I need your mother’s assistance.”

“Is there something I can do?” Lane offers. He figures this is the right thing to do with family, and any chore is his responsibility, not his mother’s.

MAHLI shook his head. “I don’t think so.”

Tamar finds humor in this situation, but she rescues her son from his own lack of understanding. “Your uncle asks me to return with him to Shiloh.”

“Why would you do that?” Lane’s words are still directed to his uncle.

Hearing the confrontational tone of her son, Tamar now rescues MAHLI. "There's going to be a new baby in the family. You're going to have another cousin."

Tamar is now smiling at both the boys, for the information applies to each.

ZIBA shook hands with MAHLI. "Congratulations, Uncle."

MAHLI peppers his reply with humility. "Your merriment might be too early."

"What do you mean?" Lane wants to know, but the confrontational tone is gone. It's replaced by concern. "You merit our respect, Uncle."

Tamar interjects again. "It's about your aunt. He's talking about Maria."

ZIBA's a bit older than Lane, and his mind went to the right answer. "She's too old."

"Too old?" Lane didn't get it yet.

Tamar saw that MAHLI was out of his element, so she explained it. "It's hard on some older women. She could bleed."

MAHLI now rejoined the conversation. "I'll need your mother to look after Maria."

"What about Joppa?" Lane had grown used to the idea of Tamar going into the city with him. He didn't want to change his plans, not after

coming this close.

"I'll look after your mother." MAHLI and ZIBA spoke the words in unison.

Embarrassed, Tamar looked at the floor.

MAHLI spoke now. "Tamar has explained to me that you are going into Joppa tomorrow."

Lane confirmed it. "I plan to and, Lord willing, I am."

"You're looking into what happened to your father?" MAHLI questioned him still.

"That's right. I need to know why he didn't return." Lane paused and then put it into words. "There's a reason he didn't come home, and I want to know what happened."

MAHLI spoke for everyone else in the room. "We will look after your mother." His eyes indicated that ZIBA was included in this promise.

"You think it's a bad idea to go into Joppa?" Lane asked, partly to see whether his uncle might already know something.

MAHLI scratched his head with both hands, rubbing his temples, actually, and he took his time before responding.

"Joppa's a dangerous place. Your father meant well in his quest to share the word of God. But, there is something wrong in that city."

"What do you mean?" Lane asked it, but all other ears in the room

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