



Up to the City

I do not often visit a big city now. So a trip to Birmingham from our quiet corner was something of an adventure. Everyday is *special* sales day - the city seethed with bargain-hungry shoppers - all of us possessing both the power to purchase and the desire to

have. Such hurry! I was caught up in a hoard of individual humanity, each with a seeming disregard of the strangers around them. It seemed as though we were living and moving individually around the shops and market stalls, like a plague of insects, pausing momentarily here and there to search for treasure or to suck up precious nectar.

This wonderful rainbow mass - all intent on personal satisfaction - producers and retailers aiming for increased profits - purchasers seeking gratification in pleasure, success, possession, thoughts of bringing happiness to others

As the short day darkened, gentle rain gave an extra sparkle to the coloured lights and illuminated hoardings, while fading light gave depth to the cacophony of voices, music and traffic. And I was aware of other depths in that crowd - mostly unseen at that time of day, but very real for many - the world of exploitation and abuse, of loneliness and fear, of anxiety and hopelessness ... Shadows lengthened character-ful old buildings became a looming presence .. people got in the way of pigeons ... I stood still to watch this vast sea of individuals - each loved by God ... each one known by him! I felt overwhelmed by this natural, everyday snapshot of life.

I was glad to catch the train home and leave the city ... but not without a sense of remorse ... How many of those among whom I had mingled knew the spiritual truth and assurance which fulfils my life? Many, I hope, but not one more because I had visited their city!

The thoughts haunted me. They were still with me when I visited His Office - although I could have found the office there in the middle of the city! In response he showed me his own city - Jerusalem - as it was when he was there. The same hustle of locals and pilgrim visitors at festival time - the same desires, motives, cries for help, needs and struggles, crime and poverty

The picture zoomed out – to a mile beyond the city walls. He was in the scene now – right at the centre - surrounded by a tight-packed crowd. He had his arm around the neck of a donkey foal as he stared out across the same city – and all the cities of the world. Tearfully, I heard him say, *Pray for the city. I took you there so that you could bring the city home. I took you there to teach you to pray!*