

CHAPTER 4

A GLIMPSE OF JESUS' CHILDHOOD

WE RETURNED from the stroll along the lake front. John had remained strangely silent during the walk and now seemed to want to stay outside with James and Ruth. I went in and sat down beside Zebedee who was still working at the nets. I had an insistent inner guidance that he had something more to tell me.

Zebedee looked at me steadily with an expression that was penetrating and yet gentle, critical and yet kind. I became self-conscious under the undeviating gaze. I felt exposed, naked to the inmost core. Suddenly he let go of me, much as an archer would release a tightly drawn bowstring. I wondered fancifully if my soul were flying through space—or time.

Then I realized that what Zebedee had just done to me, I had long been doing to myself. I had long been drawing, with a deep soul's sincere desire, on the bowstring of the wish to see Jesus, to walk with Jesus, to live, move and have my being with Jesus. And then one day—or was it one night?—I had completely let go that wish. I had let loose of the bowstring and relinquished string, bow, arrow—all—completely into the hands of the Father. Was it a hundred years ago or just last night that I had made this deep surrender, this utter release, this positive, absolute commitment of "all my ways unto the Lord?" Just last night, it seemed, and now in ways beyond finding out, in a manner beyond my power even to conceive, He was bringing them to pass! I was finding what I had sought! I stole a look at Zebedee. He was still busy with his nets, but in his gentle face there rested a deep content as one whose dreams were being fulfilled.

"So you are seeking Jesus," he mused, more as a man speaking to himself than to another. "He is a nephew of mine. I have felt from the beginning that he was different from all other men, and that sooner or later the world would come seeking him. And you are one of the first."

I stared at him. "No, oh no!" I cried. "There have been thousands—yes—mil . . ." and then I checked myself.

"I am not talking of time," said Zebedee, whose eyes were still fixed on the nets upon which his hands were busy. "Jesus never talks in time. He always talks in eternity. That is why I think all men will someday seek him out. He has said even as a boy, 'Before Abraham was I am.' " Zebedee lifted his eyes and fixed them upon me again. "I was not talking about time when I said 'first' just now. I meant that you are one of those who has put this desire first in your life. Is that so?"

"Yes," I said eagerly.

"Well, finding him with your eyes is but part of the finding. The chief way to find Jesus is to find him within. You can get close to him in this room, if you wish."

"How?"

"That is the way Jesus himself lives. He is here but he is everywhere. His soul touches all men everywhere, in the past and in the world to come, just as this air we breathe was always in the world and will be here a million years after you are gone. Moreover, this atmosphere touches everyone who is living now. It is breathed in at every breath by all who live."

"Could my soul have done the same with Jesus?"

"Yes."

"Then I need not have come?"

"Yes and no. You should have come, but sooner. To know all of one you should know him from birth on." He was no longer looking at me but at his nets. He was no longer talking to me at all—he was merely thinking out loud.

Come Follow Me

"I, too, try to live in eternity. Fishing is my avocation. Living in eternity is my business."

"Are there others on the lake like you?" I asked.

"Only my son John. James has a little of it. If Jesus can find three men who have that, he is lucky. But he says that he can find *twelve*. I doubt it."

"You said a moment ago that the way to know one is to know him from his birth on. Could one know Jesus that way?"

"Certainly. His father, Joseph, was my brother. Joseph told me of the birth of Jesus. Would you like to hear?"

"Oh, yes!"

"It was in a little stable, on a soft, clear night. The labor came slowly. Joseph was frightened. It was their first child. He knew of no physician to go to—not even a midwife. He dared not leave Mary. He knew he must do it alone. Then a great peace came to him. It came to him from Mary. She was the picture of tranquility, of serenity. She labored, yes, but as one labors with a great, vast idea—as Moses must have labored to bring forth the Ten Commandments, as David must have labored when he wrote the Twenty-third Psalm. It was such an awe-inspiring, creative labor that the awe of it took away all pain—all but once—" he paused.

"But once?" I asked. "When was that?"

"When the babe came into the world. It was all over in an instant—but it was the pain of death. 'Strange,' Mary has said, 'that birth should be so much like death.' Strange, yes, very strange—I myself have long pondered it. So did Joseph. As he sat beside Mary while she labored in a peace that overcame all pain, he said to her, 'This is not a birth. It is something else. This child that is on the way is not a child of mine but a child of God. I feel as though God Himself were about to enter this room.'

" 'I have *always* known it;' said Mary, 'only the Son of God could come this way.'

" 'But why in a manger?' asked Joseph. 'Why not in a temple?'

" 'Read your scripture,' replied Mary. She would say no more. The next instant the child came. And with him the momentary agony of death, and as he came, a quivering moan, almost like a death rattle sounded in the throat of Mary. 'O Mary, are you dying?' cried Joseph.

" 'Yes,' said Mary. 'I shall never be the same again.' And she never was."

And now I saw perspiration on the face of Zebedee. He had been strangely moved by his own words.

"I am tired," he said. "I will see you in the morning."

That night as I lay on my couch, a great longing came to me to have known Jesus as a boy. Oh, that I might receive one glimpse—just one—into his childhood! I do not know how long I had been sleeping when I heard a voice just above me speaking softly into my ear. And the voice said, "Listen, for out of the past shall come the answer. Listen, for every word ever uttered in secret shall be shouted forth from the housetop. Listen, and you shall hear."

Clear and sweet came the cadences of a youth's voice: "For I have seen that ministers in the world and priests in the temple are not able by much talking to bring peace to troubled souls. I have seen people obeying all the rules and the rules did not bring them out of the pit. All the scribes and the Pharisees putting their heads together do not seem able to save one man out of the net of misfortune into which he has fallen. Why is not the synagogue giving water out of the rock as in the days of Moses, and manna out of the air as in the time of Aaron? Can it be that God is not speaking as He used to speak?"

Then I knew that I was listening to the boy Jesus in the temple.

"Son," said a wise man in a quiet voice, "I, too, have asked that question. You are prudent beyond your years to ask it now."

"How like a little boy who yearns to hear fairy stories!" exclaimed one. "But listen, child, there was a reason for such things then. Earth and heaven were closer together than in these hard, cold days."

"Boy," said another voice, heavy and loud as one who commands, "it is better to leave such questions until you grow older. Better give your time now to obeying the law, and someday you may be able to see the light."

"The light!" exclaimed the boy. "Lo, that is what God is, is He not?—the Light of the world! And do little children have to wait until they grow up before they see the light of the sun?"

"Aha," cried one, "he has you there, Benjamin. Answer that one."

But the heavy voice did not reply, so the lad went on:

"Neither should little children have to grow up to see the Light of God—but I do not see it in the synagogue."

"What would you have us do?" asked another. "You little one who would change all things to suit your own desires, would you give up the law that has already led Israel out of Egypt and will still lead us out from Rome?"

"I would have the synagogue preach the Light, live the Light, shine forth the Light, so that God would be known everywhere."

Just then I heard a woman's footsteps as of one running, and a voice almost out of breath exclaiming, "My son, my son, where have you been? We have searched for you three days."

"Do you not know," was the reply, "that I must be in my Father's house, about His business?"

That was all. When I woke, it was day. Light was flooding the room. Was it true that God was Light? Then God was flooding the room—yes, He was flooding the world with Light, were we but aware of it!

CHAPTER 5

A JOURNEY TO CANA

I HAD AWAKENED with a great yearning to *see* Jesus. The brief glimpse of him as he descended the hill that first day had begat in me a hunger that would never be satisfied until I lived, moved and had my being in his presence. I wanted to be *filled* with the blessed sweetness of his presence.

"What is the shortest way to Nazareth?" I asked Zebedee. His massive beard rose and fell as he nodded approval, and his teeth parted in a smile.

"So it is in your blood, too? They always get it sooner or later. So you would see Jesus?"

"Exactly. And as soon as possible!"

"Well, the short road wouldn't be to Nazareth. He has been with his cousin, the Baptizer, down by the Jordan ever since you came. But now bad news has reached us. The Baptizer has been placed in prison. His followers have been dispersed. And Jesus must be returning. I doubt if he has reached Nazareth yet. He has probably tarried somewhere along the way."

Salome now appeared in the room. Her face was tense and she was going about her work even more rapidly that morning than usual.

"If our guest is thinking of going to Nazareth," she said, "we can guide him on the way. Halfway between here and Nazareth lies the little city of Cana. Our whole family is starting for the place early tomorrow for a wedding of a dear friend of ours, and we would be glad to have you with us."

"I would love to go!" I exclaimed.

"Come here, Salome, and join us," said Zebedee "Nothing to do now that breakfast is over."

"Nothing to do!" she mocked. "I have got to get everything put in order before we leave."

"That's a woman for you," sighed Zebedee.

"Yes," I thought, "I guess women are the same through all generations."

And so the next day I was on a long journey with the entire family of Zebedee. The soft dust eddied around our sandals and the Judean hills stood forth blooming and verdant under the morning sun.

Along the road we picked up a stranger going the same way. He was smooth-shaven, like James and John, a quiet simple man, tall and rangy, with a weather-beaten countenance devoid of all guile. His name, he said, was Nathanael. He was going to Cana to be with a beloved friend he hadn't seen for years—named Philip. It was a particular joy to me to have him with us, for in his curious candid way he asked questions of the others that kept the conversation channeled along the very lines in which I was most interested.

When we asked him from whence he came he answered, "I have been following John, the Baptizer, down by the Jordan."

"What is the heart of John's message?" Zebedee asked.

"Oh, this Baptizer!" said Nathanael. "He is proclaiming a new Israel. Descent from Abraham does not entitle one to free entrance into it. Position and power have no influence. Repentance alone, with the change of life that accompanies true repentance, is the only way of entering it."

"I understand," said Zebedee, "that he calls the Pharisees and Sadducees a 'generation of vipers.' Isn't that pretty hard on our national leaders?"

"But he doesn't limit his epithets to the leaders only," replied Nathanael. "He applies them to the leaders and led alike, and to rich and poor. But he does point his finger at each one's deadliest sins. To the soldiers he says, 'Be content with your wages.' To the publicans he says, 'Don't exact more than you should.' To Herod he says (and here he amazed everyone by his audacity), 'You should never have married that adulteress, your brother Philip's wife.' "

Come Follow Me

"What kind of man is this John, anyway?" I asked.

"He is like a pine of Lebanon," replied Nathanael, "not like a shade tree in our cities. His roots go down so deep, that not even the most powerful storm could shake him. He follows no advice unless he is positively sure it comes from God. He is crude in some ways, but you can't be in his presence five minutes without realizing that you are witnessing the beginning of some tremendous movement. One gets the impression that he is in a stream of destiny of some kind that nothing in heaven or earth can stop."

And so I learned much about John, the Baptizer, and about Herod, the Tetrarch of Galilee, and about the tax collectors. It seemed that sin of one kind or another abounded everywhere and John the Baptizer, almost single-handed, was trying to bring the entire world to repentance.

I found the Israelitish wedding interesting and entertaining; but very long. At the feast which began when the wedding was over, the wine was red and people were soon drinking too much. The host became disturbed and whispered to his servants, but they had no power over the guests and the house was filled with noise and uproar.

Nearby I suddenly saw the face of a beautiful, saint-like woman. She was talking with a young bearded man whose eyes were so heavenly that I instantly recognized the same Jesus that had passed me on the hill.

"They have no wine," I overheard the woman say. "Could you do as you once did in our home—bless the water and make it inspire them more than wine?"

"Woman," said Jesus, "my time has not yet come. You are trying to hurry me into something that I have not yet the commission to do. I must wait for guidance from above."

As she walked past she smiled at me and said, "My son does not flaunt the power that he has with his Heavenly Father. When he sees the need, and the embarrassment of his host, he will act. He always responds to another's need; but never, never to display his power."

Then turning to the servants she said, "Do whatever he tells you."

After awhile I noticed that Jesus was missing from the boisterous crowd. Could he have left in disgust and gone to the hills? I went out through the back doorway, past the kitchens and the servants' quarters, the most natural way to get to the mountains from there, and stopped abruptly in the hall adjoining the kitchen. For there stood Jesus looking at six open, empty stone water jars. "This is the way the Father speaks to me," he said quietly, as though he had always known me. "First the need—then the voicing of the need, then appear these six empty water jugs, like six open mouths all speaking at once. Will you ask the servants to come here, please?"

When the servants arrived he said, "Fill the jars with water." It took many trips to the well before they were all filled. As this was going on, Jesus stood before the jars in prayer. When all were filled to the brim he said, "This water is blessed and therefore it ceases to be water. It is the channel of the Holy Spirit. Those who have lost their self-control through drinking alcoholic spirits shall find Godcontrol through drinking the Holy Spirit. Now draw some out to take to the governor of the feast."

Filled with curiosity I followed. When the servants reached the governor, who was explaining to the people that the wine was all gone, he lifted the goblet to taste it and then exclaimed, "Everybody serves the good wine first, and the poorer wine after people have drunk so freely that they can't tell the difference!" And then reprovingly to the servants, "You have kept the good wine until now!"

"More wine is coming!" the ribald groups shouted to each other, and they settled down in circles to be served. Presently each one was drinking, and gradually the home grew quiet and peaceful, and happy looks came upon all the faces around the room.

"For the first time I am drinking wine I like and am growing less intoxicated with every drink," said one. And I standing by and watching the servants pass in and out among the throng, not omitting a single one from the serving, felt as one present at a sacrament.

Come Follow Me

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CHAPTER 6

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE CARPENTER

THE MORNING after the wedding, Zebedee said to me "Salome and I are returning to Capernaum today, but my sons are going on to Nazareth. They are going to throw their lot in with Jesus. If you would know him better why don't you go on with them?"

"That will be perfect!" I exclaimed.

"But, remember, my friend," he said kindly, "whenever you come back to Capernaum our house is yours."

Mary on an ass and Jesus walking beside her had left that morning before sunrise, one of the servants at the inn told me. It was midmorning before James and John finally started down the road toward Nazareth. By that time Jesus and his mother were half a day's journey ahead of us. I was almost feverish in my desire to overtake them. But we did not come within sight of them all day. After a while I found myself staring at the footprints on the path before us as we walked.

"I am walking in Jesus' footsteps," I thought. "How marvelous it would be to walk with him hand in hand!"

Reaching Nazareth at nightfall we three were welcomed in the home of some friends of James and John, and after a slight repast we all eagerly sought our beds. That night as I retired to an upper room in this strange house, my heart and mind were full of many things. In this new land of Eternity I felt such a richness of life flowing in and out and all about me. It was as though the love of all my dear ones whom I had left behind was girding me about. It was as though the joy of all my friends, yet unborn, added to the air about me a vibrancy and exhilaration. There seemed to be such a wholesomeness in this age in Palestine, as though much of the grime and dust along the road of the centuries had never accumulated; much of the customary odors of the streets and marketplaces were absent; much of the jostling and quarreling were muted as by the silencer of a violin. So real and precious, however, was this world which I had entered, that for a while I was afraid to go to sleep lest I should never waken in it again.

The next morning as early as possible after breakfast was over I went forth seeking the house where Jesus lived. Open wide to the sun, it seemed hardly a house; it was more like a protected, walled-in piece of ground. Near by was the workshop. Shavings and clean bits of newly-sawed boards lay by the open door. I paused at the threshold. A figure was moving in quiet, rhythmic motion planing the top of a table. Because he remained so silent and because I was so eager to hear his voice again I asked a foolish question, the first that came to my lips.

"Could you make something that would keep for two thousand years?"

"You mean a chair, a table, or something you could carry away with your hands?" He was smiling at me as one would smile at a child.

I nodded. "How I would treasure a thing made by you," I said.

"Beloved one," he said softly, "that which is not seen is so much more precious than that which is seen. Learn to treasure that which neither moth nor rust can corrupt, and which thieves cannot break through and steal."

His eyes were now upon his work. With an easy gesture he brushed some sawdust from the bench.

"Everything will someday turn to dust—everything but one."

"And what is that?" I asked.

"Love."

Without pausing in his work he went on, his voice growing very soft at times and at other times bursting forth with almost explosive eloquence:

Come Follow Me

"Love is a little word. It is looked down upon by kings and potentates and trampled upon by

conquering armies. But as fast as it is beaten down it will rise again. Yes, Love is a little word but it holds the planets in their places."

He paused a moment in his work and looked at me. "Love is something you cannot take hold of with your hands. It is not something that you can see with your eyes. But oh, my little brother, how much more powerful are those things we cannot see; how much more permanent are those things we cannot carry with our hands! So do not ask for furniture for the outer eye to see and the hand to feel; ask rather for that inner furniture for your heart and soul."

I sat on the threshold and fanned myself, for it was swelteringly hot. He brought a cup of water and gave it to me. I took it with both hands and as my fingers touched his, my brimming heart flowed out to him in a spiritual merging I had been longing for. Oh, how tender was the touch of his hand! I looked up into those beautiful eyes and found them looking gently into mine.

"Dear friend," he said, "you are not far from the Kingdom. I see that you are one who loves."

"I love you!" I declared.

He went back to his work. The even, rhythmic sweep of his arm as he planed the table was his only response. I sat there for a long time before he spoke again. How wonderful was that stillness! It seemed that I could sit there for all eternity. I felt a peace akin to what one feels by the open lakes or when seated on high mountains. Speech would have been a sacrilege.

Finally, after what might have been an hour, he said gently, "You cannot truly love me unless you love all those that I love."

"Oh, I do!" I cried.

"Do you love the shepherd that stood beside you when I passed you on the hill?"

I started. "Did you see me then?" I exclaimed. Then he had *seen* me! "I thought your eyes were on the sky."

"My thoughts were on you."

"Yes, I do love that shepherd who stood beside me," I cried.

"Do you love the maiden that I took by the hand?"

"Ruth? Oh, indeed I do. And what love you awakened in all when you restored her!"

"Do you love Judas?"

I hesitated. Certainly nothing like love had passed between us two. "I—I think I can learn to love him."

"Oh, you must love him," he said quietly, and the even rhythm of his work came to an end. "He needs it most of all. And his mother—some unkind ones call her the coldest, hardest woman in Capernaum. She too, needs your love. And can you love the publican and the harlot?"

I was expecting this last, and my answer was long prepared. It had been ready ever since as a child I had stood at my mother's knees and heard the story of Jesus from her lips, long before I knew the definition of those awful words.

"Oh, indeed I can," I exclaimed, "and find it not so hard, because you have done it before me."

"As I was planing this table just now I was thinking of all the tables that are spread out in the hearts of men. Little do I care what a man spreads out upon this wooden table which is made by the carpenter Jesus, but much, oh much do I care for the use put to the table of the heart made by the Anointed One, by the very body and soul of Christ."

"But I thought that you and Christ were one!" I exclaimed.

Then he leaned over me gently and laid his tender hand upon my head. It was tender but not soft. Vibrant and elastic it was, but not soft. It was the strong hand of a workingman.

"Because you are ready and able to receive it: I am the Christ!"