

CHAPTER 22

RETURN TO THE VALLEY

HARDLY HAD Jesus departed when as though drawn by a magnet the people began to appear.

"Send them away," said Judas. "We can't heal and they know we can't heal. What could have possessed Jesus to say such a thing?"

"Let us draw apart and pray awhile," said Nathanael. "This crowd is a challenge. Only as we become meek enough can we be worthy to minister to them. We must be unto them as slaves."

"Absurd," protested Simon the Zealot. "We are free men. You won't catch me playing the part of a slave."

"Nor I," mumbled Judas. "Unless we quit this nonsense I am through!"

There followed an agitated discussion among the disciples. It was finally interrupted by a kindly, intelligent-looking man whose face was drawn with sorrow and concern.

"Good men," he said, "where is the Master from Nazareth? I traced him all these miles and must find him."

"What is your need?" asked Andrew.

"It is my son," he replied. "He falls into fits, and foams at the mouth, and no one can tell when the demon will attack him."

"I am sorry," said Andrew. "Jesus will not be here today. He is on the mountain, apart with the Father. But if you will get still enough we might tune in with the Master and let some of the power he and his heavenly Father possess flow into your son."

"Ah," I thought to myself, "now the healing will come from Andrew, for he is the selfless brother of Peter the Rock, and the purest channel among these left below. His very selflessness and lack of jealousy toward his brother makes him the perfect fulfillment of Jesus' commission to us before he departed."

"Bring your son," said Philip. "Our friend here can help him."

"Yes," said Nathanael, laying his large hand on the father's shoulder and together they went into the crowd to get the boy. Meanwhile Judas and the Zealot on each side of Andrew were poring remonstrances into his ear.

"You will fail," warned Simon. "You will bring this whole movement into disrepute before the crowd."

"Only Jesus can heal," declared Judas. "And it is because of his personality. His talk of God is only a figure of speech. It is his will power, his hypnotic power that does it. When we quit this silly healing business and convince Jesus that he should use his clairvoyant power against Rome, all this drudgery with the mobs will be over."

I seized Philip by the arm.

"Can't we stop those two?" I begged. "If we let discord and divided viewpoints take control, all the power Jesus wanted channelled into this situation will be drained off."

"It is certainly not a good example," rejoined Philip, "of two or three agreeing together. Before he had time for further answer the boy was kneeling at the feet of Andrew. With Judas and Simon scowling upon him from either side, Andrew proceeded to rest his hands upon the lad's head and pray. Finally the boy, assisted by Nathanael, arose, trembling all over.

"Alas," moaned the father, "he is worse than ever. Can't any of you help? Have I come all this way for nothing?"

Come Follow Me

"Let me pray," cried Nathanael, his heart overflowing with compassion. "I can remember some

methods of Jesus. If I can say the right words something may happen."

But I could see that his faith was not equal to it. His prayer was weak, a mere reciting of words, and the scoffing, critical eyes of Judas and Simon were enough to quench any power they may have possessed.

"Let us see what a strong will can do," said Thomas, with a glance at Judas, "we haven't yet tried commanding the demon to depart. Maybe your prayers," nodding to Andrew and Nathanael, "have prepared the way. Let me try."

Very elaborately he arranged the stage as for a drama that was to be enacted. He told the father to stand behind the son with his hands upon his shoulders. Then commanding the boy to fix his eyes upon his own and gazing hypnotically into the eyes of the boy he cried in a loud voice, "Unclean spirit, I command you to come out of him. Begone. Leave. Depart."

The boy cringed away from him, turned and clung to his father, sobbing in terror.

"There, there," said the father. "Don't cry. He was just trying to help you, boy. He meant no harm."

All this aroused quite a turmoil in the crowd, hot and weary from their long tramp in the sun. Voices, jeering and threatening, rent the air.

Three rather dignified looking men stepped forward and quelled the crowd. "We are scribes from Jerusalem," the oldest shouted, "and we have come to warn you mistaken ones against running after this charlatan, Jesus, who breaks all the laws of the Sabbath and sets himself to be a prophet sent from God. What you have just witnessed should convince you of your folly in being influenced by him. These, his closest followers, have no power to heal or help any of you. They are all impostors. Have nothing to do with them."

"See here," demanded Thomas, and there was anger in his voice, "no one is going to call me an impostor—" But before he could speak further a shout went up from the crowd.

"There is Jesus now!" and they all left the scribes and the disciples and rushed up the mountainside to meet him. The disciples also hurried toward him and when we reached him he asked Andrew, "What were you discussing with them?" But before Andrew could answer, the father of the boy knelt before Jesus and said, "Teacher, I brought my son, my only boy, to you. He has a dumb spirit and whenever it seizes him it throws him down and he foams at the mouth and grinds his teeth. He is wasting away with it, so I told your disciples to cast it out and they could not."

Then Jesus turned to his disciples and said, "What have you been doing all these days that you have been followers of mine? Had you a grain of true faith you could have healed this one. Do you think that I have been performing miracles merely to exhibit *my* power? No, but to reveal the power of my Father in heaven. He can do these mighty works through you if you only believe! Oh, faithless and perverse generation, how long must I still be with you? How long have I to bear with you? Bring me the boy."

As soon as they brought the boy face to face with Jesus, a convulsion seized the lad and he fell to the ground and rolled about foaming at the mouth.

"How long has he been like this?" Jesus asked the father.

"From childhood," he replied. "It has thrown him into fire or water many a time to destroy him. If you can do anything do help us, do have pity on us!"

Jesus exclaimed, "If you *can!* Anything can be done for one who believes."

At once the father replied, "I do believe. Help my unbelief."

"Deaf and dumb spirit," commanded Jesus, "leave him immediately and never enter him again."

But Jesus, unperturbed by their shouting, quietly lifted him to his feet and behold, he was perfectly well.

I shall never forget that night, when only the inner group gathered about Jesus. For the first time they really knew who Jesus was, even Simon the Zealot. Only Judas seemed confused and unable or unwilling to understand. When I mentioned this to Nathanael he said, "As a matter of fact we are all confused and find it hard to understand." Matthew became the spokesman for the rest:

"According to the traditions of our people," he began, "the Messiah is not to be of this world but will come in the air, on the wings of the wind, to take control of the world and judge the world. And you have come in the figure of a man!"

"Just for the present," said Jesus, "but not for long. The moment the Pharisees and other leaders of Jerusalem hear that any of you are making this claim for me, they will put me to death. After my bodily appearance leaves this earth, then will the Son of Man come in the unseen realm of the Spirit."

"God forbid, Lord!" cried Peter. "This must not be. You shall not be killed by anyone."

Get behind me," replied Jesus. "This morning you were a channel for the Father to speak through you. Tonight you are a channel for the thoughts of Satan. This morning you were an aid; tonight you are a hindrance to me. Your outlook is not God's, but man's."

"But Master!" Peter's voice rose in remonstrance.

"No, Peter, this is not something that can be debated. This is a law that cannot be changed. It is only fair to reveal to you exactly what this entails. If anyone wishes to follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross day after day, and so follow me; for whoever wants to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake and the Kingdom's will save it. What profit is it for a man to gain the whole world and to forfeit his soul? What could a man offer as an equivalent for his soul?"

THE DISCIPLES ASK A QUESTION

WHEN WE reached the edge of Capernaum on our return, we saw smoke rising from the smoldering embers of a house that had burned almost completely to the ground. Judas and Simon the Zealot had preceded us and were talking with the owner who was evidently beseeching them for help. Judas as usual was carrying the purse, which he had now opened and was taking out some coins and counting them carefully; then, shaking his head, he whispered in the ear of Simon.

"Why do you whisper?" asked Jesus as he came up. "Do you not know that that which is whispered in the ear will be sounded from the housetop? Cannot we afford to contribute thirty pieces of silver to a man whose home is destroyed?"

Then, as neither spoke, he said, "You will someday be willing to see thirty pieces of silver given that a temple may be destroyed."

"What do you mean?" asked Simon.

Jesus said nothing more, but looked straight ahead with that faraway expression which sometimes came into his eyes when the crowd pressed closest upon him.

Judas also did not speak, but a shiver passed over his frame as if a window had been opened to a wind that comes sweeping down from the north laden with frost and snow. But if he knew whence came the wind, or what it would do before it returned, he showed it not.

I did not look long at the pinched faces of these two disciples. My eye went on to Jesus. After giving the silver to the unfortunate man with a word of love and good cheer, Jesus, with Judas on his left and Simon on his right, continued into the city. I kept pace. In spite of the uneasiness about Judas, a peace, a vast peace, a perfect peace, came welling up within my soul. Jesus' very nearness made the meager landscape seem complete and every object important; the straight road leading to Capernaum swept open like a bed of roses blown upon by the sweet zephyrs from the south—because he trod it.

At the fountain in the city we were met by Peter, James and John, who came rushing forward and embraced their leader. James, the spokesman for the three, cried, "The scribes and Pharisees are plotting against your life, beloved Master."

"What do I care?" he replied. "They can not hurt me. My time is not yet come. But when my time does come, then nothing on sea or land can stop their work, which is decreed."

"What is that work?" stammered Peter, aghast.

"None knows," said Jesus, "save only one and that one is the Son of Man."

"Then tell us!" pleaded Simon the Zealot. "For if we knew we could arm ourselves and cut the throats of those who would stop you. For all Israel cries out after you."

"They cry out after me but not after Him who sent me," said Jesus softly. "They are like broken reeds, torn from the roots, and ignore the fact that wholeness is necessary. They are interested in only part of me. They seek me for satisfaction of the body—not for satisfaction of the spirit. They welcome me as one anointed of men, not of God. Therefore, like broken reeds they will be weak protectors of men, because they seek only a man. They see only a man in me and value the outer kingdom a man could produce. No one can reach higher than the ceiling of his desire."

"Can we ever see the kingdom that is within?" asked Peter.

"You will, someday—and *he*, James, will, and *he*, Simon Zealot, and most of all will *this one*," and he pointed to John.

"And I?" cried Judas, and there seemed to be real anguish in his voice.

Come Follow Me

"Not in this life," replied Jesus.

"And when shall I leave this life?"

"Even before I taste death the thread of your life shall end."

"And when will that be?" asked Judas.

"You know that better than I"

A pall fell upon the group. "Then John spoke.

"Why talk you of death, Master? You who came to bring us life—you shall not die—you shall never die."

"I shall taste death," said Jesus, and I noted that he did not say that he should die. "I shall taste it and rise above it, even as I *tasted* human love and rose above it, as I *tasted* covetousness and rose above it, as I *tasted* vanity and rose above it. I have never said that I should die. I have said I shall be lifted up and that Roman hands shall tear this temple down. But it shall rise again—after three days I shall re-erect the temple from where it fell. Life shall triumph over death."

"You have truly said, Master," began James, "that life shall triumph over death, but it is not in this world. In this world death is victor over all at the last."

"Death is never victor," said Jesus. "Only the Kingdom of heaven is victor—both here and there. And the door to that kingdom is not necessarily the door of death. For those who understand, I can be the door." He lifted his eyes toward the sky, and as he did so a radiance came over him till all the air about him seemed vibrating with love. "The heaven that is above," he said softly, "is also all about us right now if we had eyes to see, in the without and also in the within. But because your ears have waxed gross and your eyes have grown dull you cannot see the kingdom outside you. So I beseech you to be still and catch a glimpse of the heaven within you. To see one heaven is to see both, for that which is within is also that which is without, and that which is without is also that which is within, even as the mountain in the reflection of the lake is the same mountain that lifts its head into the sky."

"But how can we learn to see it?" asked James. "How can we see the mountain above and below at the same time?"

Jesus turned to them as a father about to gather his children into his arms and bless them.

"Come unto me my sons, you that now labor and are heavy laden, and I shall give you the experience of peace that will enable you to feel the kingdom that is without and also within. Come unto me and follow me and be receptive and I shall make you like the lilies of the field which toil not, neither do they spin, and yet in every drop of dew they receive the full bounty of the Father. Come unto me and trust me and you shall know that underneath every sparrow that falls is the hand of the Father even as in every sunrise and every sunset and in every changing of the sowing and the harvest time is the will of the Father. Come unto me and look at me and you will see the Kingdom of Heaven moving through the world in the without, even as in Your own heart you can see it moving within you. Look up or down or out or in, and you will see the footprints of the Father. For He is everywhere, whithersoever you go."

WHO IS THE GREATEST?

TO REACH JESUS at the time when he was busiest, people more and more frequently sought out the sons of Zebedee and the sons of Jonas. In the beginning they had most often approached Jesus through Judas, naturally thinking Judas was the manager of the group because he carried the bag. The rich young ruler went to him as did Nicodemus and Simon the Pharisee. Those who had wealth and pride were naturally led to Judas because he looked the part of a leader. He bore himself like a Roman God, tall, erect, aristocratic-looking, haughty in manner, with at times a quiet dignity that made all notice him in a crowd. In some ways I think he was the most intellectual of the Twelve—the most learned, but in spiritual things certainly not the most wise. He gave the impression of wisdom, however, and of great reserve power, because he knew how to keep his silence. He was, nevertheless, a creature of moods and of late there were times when he appeared utterly depleted. Of late he had been dropping his mask of reserve, and what was being revealed was causing us all some concern.

One day I asked Philip how Judas ever came to hold so important a place with the Twelve, and he explained, "He is without question the most efficient businessman among us. Everything he touched used to turn to money. In Kerioth of Judea, where he began his work, he was so successful that a group of traders in Capernaum induced him to move to Galilee. When Jesus called him he naturally gravitated to the highest position of the Twelve. Since the Jews have been a subject race for centuries, the only fields of leadership open to us are those of religion, commerce and trade. Jesus is our religious leader, Judas our financial leader, and in some groups the office of financial leader becomes even more important than the other."

"But that is only when the religious leader's ministry is a mere cloak to amass gains, isn't that so?"

"Yes, usually. But that can never be in our band, because we don't amass gains. Jesus sees to that. Between his custom of giving to anyone in need and his refusal to let us beg for greater gifts, he keeps the bag pretty nearly empty."

"Does Judas like that policy?"

"You don't need to ask that question," he said with a knowing smile. "And yet one can't entirely blame Judas. He is a man with a gift and not allowed to use it. There is frustration there, you might call it. Another frustration arises from the way people seeking Jesus are turning more to John and James, Peter and Andrew, than to him. They do this because these four are the only ones who really understand Jesus now. They can explain things in ways the rest of us cannot. For those who seek the Master, to go first to them is like passing through a net that screens out some of the obstructions before they reach him. Of course Judas doesn't like that and he especially resents the favoritism Jesus sometimes expresses toward John."

I watched John closely after that. I could see that he was not a perfect saint himself. The growing amount of attention the crowd was giving him and his brother was stirring his ego just a little more than it should. James also wore that complacent look of one satisfied with his role in life.

Finally one day the unrest among them broke into open, angry dispute. It was revealed that two distinct factions existed. All agreed that Peter whom Jesus had ordained as his "church" should be second in command, but beyond that no choice could be settled upon. Fishermen and husbandmen in the group wanted John and James to come next; others preferred Matthew and Thomas. To increase the difficulty James and John were now actively pressing their claims to prominence and most of the rest resented their attitude of superiority.

Come Follow Me

Here were twelve men with a common mission and not the least bit of organization to tie them together. The nearest thing to it was their tacit acceptance of Judas as treasurer. The next nearest thing

was Jesus' "Prayer Cabinet" of Peter, James and John. The one force that united them was loyalty and devotion to their leader, and I had just witnessed the strain upon it of individual ambitions. Should the cement of their love for Jesus give way at any point, the entire group might fall asunder.

Of course, of all this Jesus was quite aware. One afternoon he drew us apart to a little hillside where only sheep were accustomed to wander, and this is what he said.

"You have been asking many things of late, but in this asking you are following the barley-meal hungers of the crowd and the leaven of the Pharisees. For it is not this thing and that thing that I have to give—it is myself. It is not the goods you seek and the food you desire but the Kingdom which is within. See yourselves as a part of the vine and all that the vine has is yours. You will not then need to ask for leaves and roots, for the leaves of the vine and the roots of the vine will be yours. You will not need to ask for wages if you are sons of your Father. All that your Father has is yours, and all that is yours is His.

"Enter into me, deeply into me, and be then a branch of the vine. Drink the cup that I hold out to you, for that cup holds myself. Eat the bread I break for you, for that bread is myself. Take, eat the bread and drink the wine, and know that you are assimilating me unto yourselves. You and I are one. The Father and I are one. If you abide in me and I in you, then truly are we all one in the Father, and nothing can divide us."

The greatest craving of my life, next to my yearning for the love of Jesus, was to have the trust of all men. But as I listened to him, all sense of desire faded into insignificance, for I knew that as I drew Christ into myself I had the trust of all men, and nothing could take it from me. I could see on John's face the fading away of his desire to be first in the Kingdom. That moment my love went out toward him, and I knew that henceforth he *was* first in the Kingdom. In the face of James I could not quite discern whether love had mastered his desire entirely, for the desire seemed still struggling to express itself in outer form or form, and then I knew he would be first in the *framework* of the church at Jerusalem, but not first in the hearts of men.

While I was engaged in these thoughts the sun went down and the stars came out and gradually all the figures sitting there on the hillside in rapt and silent contemplation merged and melted into one picture, one being, one soul, one mind, one heart, one Person.