

## CHAPTER 11

It was quite a trip, John thought. I would have never believed that when I returned to Atlanta, I would be changed and so would the world. I knew I wanted to be a preacher and do good works for everyone, but as Dad showed me when I arrived back, the Church was no longer ministering to the regional audience but had truly become worldwide. At the sanctuary, television cameras broadcasting to all the corners of the globe were positioned everywhere. Interpreters were hired to translate Sunday sermons. They had to buy a building just to handle the amount of donations in all forms of currency. There was even said to have been a goat or two sent from Third World countries. John smiled as he gazed upon a faded old T-shirt hung up in his private den behind glass and a frame.

Twelve years ago next week, he had headed into his father's office to ask to go on a trip of discovery. I would have never thought the difference that test of will would make, thought John.

He rose from the desk to go find Maggie. What a wonderful life he had had with her. He had two kids, Matt and Mary. Maggie was supportive in all his efforts. He had never had to doubt her love. I'm glad I was able to find the motel again, John thought. After all, I had left her a note saying I would meet her back at our room one year later. I even told her not to forget the pizza. Boy, I looked forward to that day. I registered as Mr. Waters and waited in my room. Sure enough, at the exact same time and in the exact same clothes, carrying the exact same pizza and beer, Maggie had come callin'.

After a year, a guard had shown up at his offices at the studio with that raggedy old T-shirt, saying a woman outside wished to see him. The guard must have thought John had a spring in his chair considering how quickly he jumped up and ran out the door. The poor guard tried as hard as he could to keep up shouting directions on where he got the package, as well as trying to communicate to the other security on what was going on. He saw Maggie behind the security gate, and yelled at the guard to open up. She came running through and he picked her up and spun her round and round. They had laughed and giggled right in front of the whole church staff until his Dad and Mom had shown up, demanding to know the cause of such a stir.

The wedding was a media sensation, and John's Mom and Dad were just thrilled with their new daughter-in-law. The only news greater was the birth of their children. But, as happy as they were, Maggie knew there was still the emptiness.

The home was a mansion. "Maggie! Maggie!," John shouted. He laughed. He knew she hated when he yelled for her like that.

"John Love, you stop that shoutin' right now, ya' hear?" Maggie scolded from the top of the curved staircase.

"Well, where is everybody?" John asked. "Why, you lonesome, you little baby?"

"Not now that you're hear," John teased back.

"Well, if you would pay attention to me once in a while, you would remember that the nanny is taking the children Christmas shopping, the butler is visiting his family before our Christmas dinner, and the maid is off today."

"You mean we are all alone in this big house?" John eyes grew big and a sly smile crossed his lips.

"Oh no you don't. Don't even think it. Last time this happened I had Mary nine months later." Maggie started to smile and ran back up the stairs.

John had just begun to tear off after Maggie when the front doorbell rang. "Saved by the bell." John laughed and headed to open the door.

"Wait, John." Maggie said forcefully. "Nobody was announced by the front gate."

"Well, it's probably the guard or the kids needing a hand to carry the gifts. Besides, what are we to do? Hide in the kitchen until a butler comes to open the door?"

John reached for the handle and opened the door. Outside stood a small woman dressed in a cotton dress and no shoes.

"Mr. Love?" She asked.

"Yes?" John said. There was something strange about her. How did she get here? He wondered. Was she one of the religious fanatics? Somehow it didn't seem to matter.

She handed him a letter. John took it and turned to open it. Before he could look back, the door closed. John reached and opened it again, but the messenger was nowhere to be found. John stepped on the porch to search for her, but couldn't see her anywhere. John stopped looking for her and started to read the note that was in the letter she had left. John stared at the letter until Maggie touched him on the shoulder.

"What does it say, John?" She asked.

"Maggie, I have to go." John said. "Now" John turned and headed up the stairs. "Call the plane and tell them to get ready for takeoff. Tell them to set a heading for Jerusalem."

John had dropped the note on the floor in his hurry to pack. Maggie picked it up and looked at it. It was just a blank sheet of paper.

"John, what are you doing?" Maggie asked. "What does this piece of paper mean to you?"

She was worried now. John had never seemed anxious in all the time she had known him. It was as if he was being driven by some inner fire.

John turned, tears were on his cheeks, but a happiness and peace engulfed his soul. "He's calling me. He needs me now. It's the Somebody. It's time."

Maggie started throwing clothes in another bag and making phone calls. "What are you doing?" John asked.

"Honey, I've heard about this someone for 12 years. If you think I'm not going to see for myself who this someone is, you do not know the person you married." Maggie said, tears streaking

her cheeks also.

John smiled, helped Maggie pack her things, grabbed their bags, and headed for the airport with Maggie.

James sat under a fig tree in near Jerusalem. Soon he would make his way to the river. He knew John would be waiting for him there. It still was a little unsettling to have this advanced information. Twelve years and now it was time to go home. He had felt that Aunt Jenny wasn't all that well for the past few days and he knew that she was waiting to see him before she went to be with his Father. He had hardly had time to write to his family a few notes here and there, a small gift and an occasional phone call when he could manage it. He knew his Father was looking after them; it was the only prayer he ever made to his Father and the one he knew He kept.

It seemed forever since he had finagled his way onto that cruise ship, working his way across the ocean as a bus boy. He had had time between chores to think, eat, and rest. This is when he had met Pierre. He was taken a little aback at first when Pierre had approached him. Having been away from home for over two months and without close companion for the same amount of time James wasn't used to people recognizing his significance. Pierre had kneeled before him in their quarters after a shift and asked for His blessing. James, eager to have a friend instead of a disciple, asked him to sit with him and talk. It took some coaxing and assurances of James' divinity to finally get Pierre to settle down, but after an evening of conversations, they had been close friends ever since. Pierre, for his part, couldn't believe that he had formed a friendship with the child of Christ, but had accepted his good fortune and James' company.

When they had reached France. Pierre asked if James wanted to see his family and spend some time in Paris. James readily accepted, and had begun his habit ever since of taking various jobs and spending time with many different families and people. In England, he had met Tommy, in South Africa, Mobutu, Arabia, Ahmed, and in China, Lu Chan. All had stayed with him through thick and thin. Each had known instinctively of his divinity, and each had stayed with him initially because of his position. However, each had become a friend, and although his status did not alter they looked on him more as a brother than a Son of Jesus.

That was not to say they kept him from harm or from living His life as a man. His trip to Sweden with Pierre and Tommy for a year almost cost him his soul. It was there that James had begun to see the evil that could exist in concert with man. The trip into the wasteland of mankind began in the tired souls of a brothel. Not surprised to find out that James was still a virgin but, taken aback that he wanted and needed to discover the sexual side of himself, Tommy and Pierre had laughingly taken him to a brothel. James remembered being half-afraid to hear his Father admonish him for such transgressions, but he heard nothing and went ahead.

"I haven't done anything like this before," James stammered as he looked at the woman seated on the bed.

"Oh, don't worry, baby," she smiled. "It won't hurt you." "What do I do now?" James asked. "Well you just stand there and I'll take care of everything," she said. The woman stood up and walked slowly over to James and started removing his clothes.

James' embarrassment is what he remembered most. He was more afraid of his own body and its appearance. He still was especially surprised at how much significance he put into his physical performance. He was so wrapped up in the feeling of self that he barely remembered the girl.

"You satisfied, sugar," asked the whore. The conquest itself was over in minutes.

James nodded his head and headed to the streets somewhat poorer in purse and, he felt, his spirit. None the less, the physical release had been wonderful and he had resolved to return another night and explore more fully this side of man.

"You want a date, sugar?" The whore smiled a worn smile. She was dressed in a faded pink top, with a dirty blue mini-skirt. She had weather worn white stiletto heels on and leaned a little too much from drink.

"Why sure," said James as he lifted her up on the bar. "Two rounds of whatever, barkeep."

"We celebrating, sugar?" Asked the whore.

"I always celebrate," said James lighting up some 'smokes' from his pocket. "That the good kind, honey? You got some for me?"

"Take a little toke on this one, baby." James was feeling good and starting to get high again. "Whee!" she said taking a drag. "That was good. Let's go party in private, sugar."

James fondled her breast and grabbed her ass as he lifted her back onto the ground. "Lead on, sweet thing."

The room was dimly lit and smelled of stale beer and cigarettes. The tables were worn down to the wood of which they were originally made. One door led to a decaying street reeking with the stench of a hundred establishments such as this. The lady plied one more drink from James, before he fell headfirst in the old booze that covered the table. Seeing no more life or money in her 'date', the whore walked over to the bar and waited for another man to entertain.

For almost a year he had frequented the strips of Sweden, seeking comfort with the people of these districts. James had experienced his first cigarettes here, and drugs. The combination of sex and drugs was extremely overpowering and James loved it. Tommy and Pierre had stayed with him, protected him, during this whole process, but had never tried to keep up or stop him. But now they were trying desperately to convince him to leave to move on. No amount of coaxing seemed to help. James had lied about his whereabouts and even snuck out and hid from them. James realized that a coldness had come over him. A despair, an evil he could not explain; even though he did not wish to hurt people, he did not care he only wanted his pleasure. He knew he was losing himself, and did not know how to leave. This was when he saw Katy.

"Well what do we have here?" said Katy when she saw James in the pool of beer.

"He's used up, ducks." shouted the whore at the bar. "I just took his last mark."

James half raised his head from a drugged and drunken stupor. His eyes were glazed over and he could barely make out the tramp in front of him.

"He seems to have some life left girl? You sure you got it all." said Katy. Katy was an old soul of 28 years.

"Best I could figure. Rifled his pants when he passed out on the bed."

Katy saw a desperation and sadness in that look James had given her. Just as she was about to turn Tommy and Pierre came in the bar.

"James." said Pierre and rushed to his side.

The tenderness and care with which they handled James kept Katy's attention on the drunk at the table. James tried to stand up and run from his friends and fell towards Katy.

"Whoa, big boy." Said Katy as she held him up. She looked directly in James eyes and saw a plea for help from the lost. She motioned to Tommy and Pierre to help her.

"Take him up to my room, its close." she said. Tommy and Pierre stood motionless. "Hurry now!"

At her last command they finally moved. It took two days and a lot of coffee, but James sobered up enough to talk. And they talked. James confessed the very torture of his soul and without blinking, without missing a beat, Katy told him to just seek God. Like that, she knew what he should have known.

James did. He left her bosom and walked to a soft dark corner of the night and spoke with his Father for the first time in almost a year. He asked for help and his Father answered. He lost his addiction to tobacco and drugs that night. James stayed another week with Katy and regained his strength. On his last night there, Katy had invited him to her room, where they had shared love no money, no trade, no drugs, no liquor, no requirements, just two people being together to share the moment and the company of each other. It was the first time James had ever experienced sex or tenderness together in such a fashion. It was far better than any intimate moments he had shared with any other. He felt envy for those that shared this extraordinary bond done with love. James still had sexual desires, but he knew now that to have the true togetherness with a woman there had to be trust, respect, love and a mutual giving. He left shortly after that night, but Katy's memory steeled him and prepared him for his future.

He had learned a lot in that trip into the wilderness. He had learned that the absence of care and morality were the true evils in men. The absence of God the true Hell. He had learned to respect men who did what was right, who cared and did so without the confirmation of a heaven or hell, but with a faith in justice, goodness, and the Lord. He did not ever have to develop faith, for he had always known of the existence of the Lord and His blessings. But to act without that knowledge was one of the true glories of man.

"I do understand now why my Father so loved this world." James had said. "Only mixed

with the cruelty of evil can one see the great significance of good. It is real irony that one has to have both to understand either one. It does make for interesting combinations and keeps a body totally fascinated with the results." opined James.

"Now on to the Jordan," he said now. "I suppose John will be there shortly and I hope Katy will join me."

James rose to go. He had asked his Father not too long ago to allow him to service the poor and the poor in spirit. Having traveled so far in so many years, he was inspired by the acts of those who did so much with so little and wished to help them. As opposed to his Father, who was sent with a specific course of action, James was choosing what he hoped was a vocation that he could keep until a very old age, at which time he could then reside permanently by his family and Father.

When James had spoken to his Father about this, it was evident that his decision greatly pleased Him. His Father asked that before he begin his work that he be baptized by a descendant of John the Baptist, in the location that He Himself had been baptized. It pleased James to thrill his Father so, and he readily agreed. His Father made all the arrangements and sent for the descendant. That was how James knew that John would be waiting.

James was certain of the direction he would now go in life, but still wary of the responsibility of being the Son of Jesus and the responsibility of guiding and helping those in need. He was aware that the baptism was more than a sprinkling of water into his face. It would allow him some of the powers of enlightenment that were granted his Father and although he was not going to be a prophet or priest, he would be accepting a mantle and responsibility only one other in the history of the world could know. James was, in effect, accepting and declaring who he was.

Katy was there. James ran to her. Surrounded by Pierre, Lu Chan, and Mobuto, it was difficult to make his way to her side, but his friends finally relented and allowed them to embrace.

"I thought you were just a fond memory, James." Katy smiled.

"There has not been a day I did not think of you in the last twelve years," James said warmly. In a world of women, his thoughts had always turned to her and her tenderness.

"Well, I couldn't believe it when this short Frenchman came calling at my door. I asked if he was hiding you and he just grinned and invited me to Palestine. I said it was quite a ways to go for a baptism, but considering it was you and the trip was paid for, how could I resist?" she grinned. "Oh, it is so good to see you. I had hoped that you would not forget me."

"Forget you? I was scared to death that you would have nothing to do with me. That I was but one of... Oh, you know what I mean," cried James.

"I know and I never forgot you. You dear, sweet man." Katy sighed. "All right, enough of that," said a familiar voice.

"Tommy!" Katy squealed. She grabbed James' hand and they both rushed over to greet him. "Enough, enough," protested Tommy as he was hugged by Katy and the rest of the crew.

"James, all is ready as you requested." Tommy smiled as he turned to face James.

They had been standing in a field up from the shore of the Jordan River. It was a small oasis in a hot land and one could hear the river flowing nearby. The area of the baptism was shielded by the bank and a fence of trees and bushes from peering eyes, but was definitely the spot that James' Father had been baptized some 2000 years before.

"Well, now we just need the preacher," said Mobutu.

"And here he comes now, I believe," said James.

As they looked across the field, a small jeep stopped and two figures emerged from the vehicle. It was quite a way to the road, so they weren't able to get a clear view of the people approaching for a few moments. As they grew closer, it was evident that they were dressed in khaki and one was a woman and the other a man, both about the same age as James.

"Do you know these people?" Katy asked.

"Never have had the pleasure before," James replied without taking his eyes off the new guests.

"Then how do you know who they are? How do you know you can trust them?" Asked Katy worriedly.

With that question all of James friends and James himself turned simultaneously and smiled at Katy as if she was the only one not in on the joke.

John got out of the jeep first. He had never been in this part of Palestine, but knew instinctively where to go. He had paced nervously for two days before he had been summoned to this point. Maggie, God love her, had just stayed right by his side, never questioning or second guessing his motives. When the call came he had to sneak out of the motel, as it had not been more than two hours that the world had known he was there. The usual reporters and believers crowded the motel as soon as they knew he had arrived.

He used the skills developed in his first world tour to avoid the crowd and ended up right here. And there James was. In that crowd of people, there he was.

John slowed enough to let Maggie catch up and looked more closely at the group ahead of him. There were two black men, two white men, an Asian man, an Arab, and a white woman.

For a brief, shining moment, John knew, and the vision overwhelmed him. John fell on his knees before the Son of His Lord, tears of joy welling in his eyes.

"It is I that should ask for a baptism from you," John said as he looked into the deep brown eyes of James.

"You have served our Father well and answered His call when asked. Your father, whose name you bear, went into the wilderness and preached of my Father's coming. For his faith, he baptized my Father. For your faith and work and in honor of your forefather, my Father has asked that you baptize me."

"As was the honor of my forefather, so is the honor with me," replied John.

"You know we can talk plain old 'merican'," laughed James. "It may be a momentous sacred

occasion, but I would hope the world has progressed enough to dispense with some of the more formal religious dogma. Besides, I would also hope that the man who would baptize me also share my friendship." With that, James put his arm around John and led him towards the river.

Katy was bewildered. Maggie stood and gaped at her husband and the man with him. They both turned and looked at each other, then giggled openly at their expressions.

"What do you make of that?" Maggie asked, extending her hand. "I'm Maggie. And you are?"

"Katy, pleased to meet you," said Katy, taking her hand. "And after knowing James, I am not surprised at anything that may happen with him around."

Tommy shouted to them from the edge of the river. "Come on, ladies, or you'll miss it." "Nice of them to remember us." Katy laughed.

"Yes, well I think we should at least hurry on to see what my husband dragged me 5000 miles for," said Maggie, trotting ahead.

"You don't know?" asked Katy, catching up. "No."

"Why, It's James' baptism," replied Katy.

Katy and Maggie reached the edge of the bank to see James, draped in a white robe, enter the waters of the Jordan with John. Maggie stopped still, looked incredulously at Katy, then at the scene before her. Katy just nodded.

Why would John travel 5000 miles to baptize some black man in the River Jordan? Maggie thought. Then her attention was drawn back to the scene before her.

There on the bank were the various men she had met just moments before. Tommy, the one who had yelled to them was on her left looking towards the water and her husband. The rest were arranged in a semicircle on the bank with the short, French-looking man on the right. They were all wearing white robes and intently staring at the scene before them.

Maggie suddenly felt the stillness and heard her husband's voice as if it were in a cathedral. The words were the familiar incantations he had said a hundred times before, but each syllable, each sound was crystal clear, as if she were standing beside him in the most quiet of all places. She smelled the air and the fragrance was like no other she had ever known. It was immensely pleasing and soothing. She exchanged glances with Katy and realized they were both experiencing the same sensations. Maggie could hear every word, every creature, every ripple of the river as clear as if it were the only sound being made, yet no sound interfered with the smooth, beautiful words being spoken by her husband.

Katy's glance at Maggie confirmed that she was not alone in her feelings. Her skin felt so smooth her body so alive. She just wanted to be at one with all around her. It had been so long since she had known peace.

Because they had been so intent on the feelings and scene around them, it was Maggie and Katy who first saw it. As James ducked his head under the waters of the Jordan, Maggie and Katy

both looked up to see the source of the flapping sound that had entered into serenity of this moment. One white dove descended.

Then James raised His head above the water and Katy and Maggie knew. The light enveloped them from above. The dove landed upon the hand of John that was placed upon the shoulder of James. Music of immense beauty filled the sky and all the company felt joy. Tommy, Pierre, Lu Chan, Mobutu, and everyone were dancing and laughing and joyous. James smiled upon John as they both walked out of the water and the dove circled overhead. And Katy and Maggie fell sobbing to the ground.

Tommy was the first to reach Katy and Maggie. Dropping to the ground to hold onto Katy he reached to grab the hand of Maggie.

"It is quite overwhelming isn't it" Tommy said.

"Overwhelming?" Katy said incredulously between sobs. She started beating her fist against Tommy's chest. "Why did you never tell me? Why didn't you warn me how special this, he, was?"

Tommy smiled, looked into her tear-streaked face and said, "Would you have believed me?" Tommy looked over to Maggie. "Would you have believed your husband? Or would you both have thought us nuts?"

The light was fading now and the music had dimmed, but the joy was still felt by everyone. James walked over to Katy and Maggie. They not knowing the right way to greet the Son of the Lord, cowered back and sank closer to the ground. Then James smiled and they rose to greet him. "My Lord..." Katy began to say and James held up His hand to ask their silence.

"James, Katy, my name is James. Baptized here before God and my friends. I realize that I am more than you can comprehend, but yet I was born and raised a man. While in this form I am James and you shall be, if you will allow me, Katy." said James lightly.

"I have come to this earth with no other desire, but that of my Father's. And His desire was to have a son raised upon the world He and His Father so truly loved. Therefore, I am here, born as you were into this world to experience the joys and sorrows that make this planet and its people so wonderful. I have chosen to follow in my Father's footsteps in that I wish to help those that need to be lifted up and give hope where none exists. The same noble profession your husband has chosen." James looked at Maggie.

Turning back to Katy, James continued. "Therefore I am and have been a man Katy. Born to greater expectations than any can think yet still a man. I know it cannot be as it was, but I do wish that before you call me Lord, you could call me friend. I do treasure your friendship greatly, and hope that you would also treasure James' friendship."

Katy smiled and rose. "I do not think it would be so bad to be the personal friend of the Son of God." She giggled embracing James.

Pulling away, she said, "Although it has always been a great honor to be the friend of James. So, therefore, I shall always be James' friend, whether he be the Son of God or not."

Maggie stood aside and watched as Katy and James spoke. John had come to stand beside her and put his arm around her waist.

"What of you, Maggie?" asked James. "Would you too, be my friend?"

"I do not know you as James to say whether I would be his friend, but I feel I would be a fool to deny the friendship of the Son of God." Maggie smiled.

"Then I will use that advantage to try to influence you to know and be James' friend," chuckled James.

"Done." Maggie clasped his hand in friendship. "I hate to ask, but would there be anything to drink?"

"And eat!" Exclaimed Mobutu. With that, four or five coolers were brought from under a bush and all sat down to have a picnic with the Lord.