

THE THIRTEENTH DISCIPLE

MONDAY MORNING.

My name is Simon. I am 72 years old and the father of two grown sons. I am wealthy but I do not count money for my gain. I have always considered myself a righteous man, a man of God. The events of the last two days, however, have changed all that.

My eldest boy is Bryan and the younger is Timothy or Timmer for short. Bryan has always been an old man. By that I mean he is quiet, conservative, and shy. He does not take risks. He does not fight. He does not complain. Though he is older he has always looked up to Timmer. Timmer was the wild one, the rule breaker, the daredevil. He was never cruel or mean spirited but he was clever and quick.

Looking back I think Bryan must have derived some excitement from his little brothers adventures, for he was always there watching from a distance, like some pint-sized guardian angel. Bryan loved his brother and protected him more often than Timmer ever knew. There was the time when Timmer had somehow managed to swindle all the neighborhood boys out of their money. They eventually figured out the trick and came looking for him. It was Bryan who headed them off and paid them all out of his own savings. I would never have known had I not noticed the sudden dramatic change in the money jars of both boys. But I could not punish Timmer, Bryan would not hear of it. To punish the younger boy would be to punish the innocent elder whose only goal had been his little brother's safety.

I have always tried to instill both my sons with a faith and love for God. We went to worship every week. Bryan would sit solemnly by my side while Timmer would endeavor to sneak away as soon as my eyes had closed in prayer. I told them how one could sense the Spirit of God emanating from a righteous man like the smell of rain just before a spring storm. Bryan looked out the window at distant rain clouds as if he expected to see the King of heaven riding them, while Timmer only asked if that meant that God smelled musty. But in spite of all this I believed that my son would one day find his God. I prayed for it.

Last year Timmer, then twenty-five and chomping at the bit, told me he was leaving for the city. I was overwhelmed with anxiety but I knew a taste of the real world was some times just what a young man needed to realize that he could only survive with God's help. He took every bit of his savings as well as several thousand that I had set aside for him and left. He sent me a note upon his arrival; something about how he had got there and it was all so glorious. I never heard from him after that. From time to time I'd hear from friends that he was doing well, making lots of money, but hanging out with bad sorts of people. I prayed for him all the more.

Then yesterday morning a neighbor came and told me of a preacher that had just arrived from the city. He was speaking in the square that morning. Apparently the man had quite a reputation, everything from healing the sick to walking on water. Peoples imaginations tend to run wild with gossip, still one thing that put it all in perspective was the message he had. One of love and forgiveness. Bryan and I decided to go out and see him. He had a dozen or so disciples that traveled with him and I half hoped that one of them might have run into Timmer when they passed through the city.

We sat in the crowd close to the front. I could not believe how many were there. Perhaps hundreds. The man was tall and handsome with strong muscular hands like those of a blacksmith or a carpenter. I knew instantly that this was no ordinary preacher. I could feel the Spirit of God in this man and it put me at ease. He spoke of heaven as if he'd been there and of God as if He were his own Father. Then he told a story of a man with two sons; an obedient elder and wild-hearted younger. He looked right at us as he spoke. He told how the younger son had gone off to the city taking all his money and inheritance. Bryan and I looked at each other. We both knew he was speaking of Timmer. The preacher had seen him, had perhaps even spoken to him. We began to fidget with excitement.

Then the preacher told how the younger son fell on to hard times and was living in poverty. I began to weep. My son, was in trouble, that was why he had not written. It all made sense. Bryan

looked at me with worried eyes. But the preacher told how the young son returned home to welcome arms and the family was reunited. I was overjoyed Timmer was on his way home. I jumped up and ran for home with Bryan right at my side.

Bryan ordered the servants to prepare his brothers room. We called for musicians and sent to the market for the best of everything. I called all my friends and told them we would celebrate the moment my son arrived. There are two main roads from the city so I sent two of my best men to look for Timmer. He would probably be on foot and would be tired from the journey.

Finally everything was prepared. I sat down on the front porch facing the gate and strained my eyes for signs of my son. Bryan paced the front yard anxiously. After a while I dozed. It was dark when Bryan shook me awake. One of the riders was returning and he had someone with him. Bryan and I hugged each other in joy. But even before they reached the gate I could tell it was not Timmer. As the men dismounted I looked to my servant, "who is this? Where is my son?" I asked. My servant dropped his eyes to the ground and said nothing. The stranger spoke up, "I knew your son in the city, sir. We were good friends, and occasionally partners in business. I felt it was my duty to tell you."

"Tell me what?" I asked.

"Your son is dead, sir. I'm very sorry."

I did not comprehend the meaning of his words. Bryan looked as if he would shake the man or strike him.

"My son is coming home. The preacher told me today. Perhaps he is on the other road."

"No, sir," the stranger insisted, "he is dead. Four days ago, murdered by thieves in a very bad section of the city. I saw his body. So tragic, they took every penny. I can't figure why he was in that neighborhood with all that money. He had so much going you know. I had talked with him only that morning and he told me how he was liquidating all his assets for a new venture. Said it would make him richer than he ever dreamed. Invited me along but I thought it sounded too risky."

I don't remember what else the stranger said. My legs gave out beneath me. I remember Bryan catching me and carrying me up to my room. I don't know how long I cried before I finally slept. I awoke this morning to find my pillow still wet with tears and Bryan standing at the window looking out. He turned as I stirred and I could see he had not slept. His face was stained with tears. I came to his side and we looked out and saw in the distance the square where the preacher was once again sitting with the crowds.

I am filled with rage. I have sat down now to document what I am about to do. I am going down to the square, to his man on whom the Spirit of the Most Holy rests so heavily, and to his face I will renounce both my faith and my God. All my life I have prayed for my son's salvation, and now not only does this God, take my child in the midst of his sinful greed without a chance for repentance, but he mocks my prayers by giving me hope that my son would return to me, all the while knowing that the boy was already dead.

I can not love or worship such a God as this. If I must go to hell to see my son again, so be it.

MONDAY AFTERNOON

My hands are shaking. I am so excited. There is much to be done, but I must write down the events of the last few hours. Bryan and I arrived in the square. We pushed our way through the crowds. Finally I stood before the preacher eye to eye. He looked at me with compassion and sorrow, but I would have none of it. Just as I was about to speak a man sitting next to him stood up and said, "You're Timothy's father, aren't you?"

Surprised to hear my son's name I said, "yes, I am. Who are you? And how do you know my son?"

“I was once his servant, sir,” the man said, “and I have come to find you. I got lost along the way but I ran into the Master,” he gestured toward the preacher,” and he said you’d be along soon. He was just telling me how God himself will often welcome his lost ones home personally, isn’t that beautiful?”

I glared at the preacher. I’d had about enough of his sweet words and promises. I took a step toward him but the servant put out his hand. In it was a letter.

“Your son wanted me to give this to you,” he said. “He wrote it last Thursday morning. I’m sorry I took so long to get to you.”

My hands shook as I took the letter. I opened it and Bryan read it aloud to me.

This is what it said:

Dearest Father,

I’m sorry I haven’t written. I’ve been so caught up in business that I just never got to it. But not anymore. Yesterday I met a preacher. He’s been preaching around the region and has gotten quite a reputation. I must say I wasn’t prepared for him though. Do you remember how you used to say you could feel the spirit of God coming from a righteous man? Well now I know what you mean. The way this man talks about heaven you’d think he built it himself. He makes you feel like you’re a part of God’s immediate family. I wish you and Bryan could hear his voice. I asked him what I’d have to do to enter heaven and he said I’d have to sell everything, give it to the poor and follow him.

Now, I have to say I was a little put out by that. A few of my friends in the crowd laughed at me because they know how rich I am and I how unlikely that is. I went home pretty depressed. And I have to tell you I wrestled with it all night. Finally I prayed. I don’t ever remember doing that before. But I’m glad I did. You see, I realized that I wasn’t happy. I had money, power, friends, but no meaning. What I really want is to do is what that preacher and his disciples are doing. Healing broken hearts, reuniting them with God. Now that’s real wealth. If I could bring one broken heart back to God I will be rich beyond my wildest dreams.

If you can believe it, I’ve already sold my house and property. My business partners have agreed to buy me out. I’m taking the proceeds from the house down to the poor section of town today. I’m going to help all those people I’ve been ignoring for so long. I feel so alive! I did not realize how lost I was till God found me. As soon as I’m finished selling everything I’m going to catch up to the preacher. He’s got twelve disciples already but he’s always inviting people to join. I understand he’ll be coming your way soon, so God willing, I’ll see you and Bryan again. Until then I remain your loving son,
Timothy.

As Bryan finished reading I looked to the preacher. He must have read the apology in my eyes because his face reflected acceptance and joy. Bryan was beaming with tears and happiness. Timothy had not died in sin, but he had found his God and had returned to Him. God himself had indeed welcomed my son home, personally.

Together Bryan and I went home as fast as our legs would carry us. We called for musicians and sent to the market for the best of everything. I called all my friends and told them we would celebrate as planned. Even now the our courtyard is filling with people and music. The rejoicing has begun for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again, he was once lost and has now been found.

The End.