

coming him with friendship, yet searching too, disturbing, demanding.

"I am glad you have come," Jesus said. Daniel could say nothing at all. For a moment he was afraid. Only when the man turned away and his eyes no longer held his own, could he breathe freely again.

Simon found a place for the boys between two burly fellows who reeked of fish and garlic. Someone had led Jesus to the seat of honor at the head of the table. Several women were moving now among the men, carrying wooden platters of bread and lettuce and small fish fried in oil. They placed the dishes on the mat before Jesus, and he looked up with a warm smile.

"You must have worked long, my daughters," he said, "to provide a feast for so many."

The women glanced sideways at each other, smiling, their brown faces flushed. Jesus reached out and took a wafer of bread from the plate.

A voice spoke from the end of the table. "Teacher," a man said, "no one has provided for us to wash our hands. In this house do you not observe the Law?"

The woman of the house gasped, hand against her mouth in dismay. All her pride and pleasure was wiped out in an instant. "Was it needful?" Her eyes pleaded with the carpenter. "I did not think-so many-"

"Do not be distressed," Jesus answered her gently. "It was not needful." He looked down the long mat toward the man who had spoken. "In this house the food has been given us with love," he said slowly. "Let us make sure that our hearts rather than our hands are worthy to receive this gift." He stood up, his long white robe hold-

ing the light, and spoke a blessing over the bread. Then he passed the platter to the one beside him.

nearing sunset when they started back toward the smithy.

"He's going to be one of the best we have," Joel said.

"But you should have stopped us. When I get started on an argument I forget what time it is."

He did not seem to want to hurry, however, and shortly it appeared that he had something else on his mind.

"I've put off telling you this," he said finally. "I don't know just why. I saw your carpenter again."

"Was Simon with him?"

"Yes. As a matter of fact, when I told you that day that I'd run into Simon, that wasn't altogether true. I went back to Bethsaida on purpose. I went back several times. Lately I've been getting up early to hear Jesus when he talks to the fishermen."

Daniel was surprised. "You think he will help us?"

Joel hesitated. "He has helped me. He has explained several points of the Law that have always puzzled me."

"Explained them to you? You're the scholar. He is only a carpenter."

"I don't know where he got his training," Joel said.

"But he knows the scripture. Some of his ideas are the same as Father's, only he seems to go beyond somehow. He has a way of making something very clear and-uncomplicated-so that you wonder why you never thought of it that way before."

"The first time I heard him," Daniel said, "I thought that if only he and Rosh could join together-"

"I've thought so too. So many people follow him. Some mornings there are more than a hundred. If anyone could persuade them-But then again I'm not sure. I wish you'd come to listen to him, Daniel. Every time I hear him I wish you were there. We both think-"

I or anyone else, cared what happened to them. When I see that, I know that the God of Israel has not forgotten us. Or why would He have sent Jesus to them, instead of to the rich and the learned? Like a shepherd, he says, who will not let any of his sheep be lost. I'm a poor man, and ignorant, but I know now that with a God like that I am safe."

Daniel stood staring at his friend. Simon had lost his senses altogether. "Safe? Jesus has put you all in danger!"

Simon's voice was steady. "Jesus has taught us that we must not be afraid of the things that men can do to us."

"Suppose they put chains on all of you and drag you off to prison?"

"He says that the only chains that matter are fear and hate, because they chain our souls. If we do not hate anyone and do not fear anyone, then we are free."

"Free? In chains? Simon-you know what they could do to you! How could you possibly not be afraid?"

"I don't say I am not afraid," said Simon. "But Jesus is not. And he is the hope of Israel."

"What has he done to prove it? How do you know you're not risking your life for nothing?"

"We can never know," Simon answered slowly. "God hides the future from man's eyes. We are forced to choose, not knowing. I have chosen Jesus."

"This was his chance tonight. Do you think he will ever do anything now?"

"I don't know what he will do. It is enough for me that he has promised."

"It is not enough for me!" Daniel cried. "Promises are easy. They are nothing but words. I want a leader who will make his promises good!"

He flung himself away from Simon and stumbled ahead