

CHAPTER SIX

The Beginning of Knowledge

After taking a few minutes to explain why I was late getting home, I told Elizabeth the details of my conversations with John.

"I don't know," she said. "It sounds pretty hard to believe. I think sometimes you are a little too eager to believe some of the weird stuff you get into. I mean, look at it from my point of view. One moment this man is just a bell ringer for the Salvation Army and the next minute he has you believing he's the Apostle John from the time of Christ. You told me not to tell anyone about this. You don't have to worry about that. I'm afraid if I did that they would put you away. Then I'd have nobody to take care of me during my last few months on this earth."

"I know it sounds crazy," I said, shaking my head, "and there is no way he could have convinced me in so short of time, but when he put his hand next to mine and looked at me, it was like he and I were one person. For an instant, I saw his thoughts, his purity and his memories from the days of Jesus. There was something so real about it that it is impossible to describe. After the thought transfer, I am more positive that he is the Apostle John than I am sure of being here in this house at this moment. It sounds crazy, but you've got to trust me on this."

"I trust you more than anyone I know, but you sometimes make mistakes, and your judgment is not always perfect. I trust your sincerity one hundred per cent, but you are not infallible."

"But you know I've never lied to you. I'm telling you John put his thoughts and some of his memories in my mind as clear as day."

"But I wasn't there. Maybe he's some master hypnotist of some kind, with perhaps an evil design."

"I can't blame you for doubting. I probably would, too, if you came home telling me a story like this."

"I'm not saying that your story about John is not true. I'm just not convinced. I'll tell you what would convince me, though."

"What's that?"

"Do you remember reading in the New Testament that Jesus gave his disciples the same power to do miracles that he did? If I remember right, they did some of the same amazing healings that Jesus did."

"You're right. I even have some of John's memories planted in me of some great miracles not even in the Bible. I have the recollection of John walking on water, and another time of his putting out a great fire by his word and saving many lives... Then, again, he brought back a friend from the dead even as Jesus did with Lazarus."

Elizabeth's eyes brightened. "So, he should have no problem healing me, then, should he?"

"I know he could. He spoke about the correct use of power, though, as if I did not understand it. Maybe healing you is something he is not allowed to do for some reason. During World War II, he was strung up with piano wire and unable to save himself."

"But on other occasions he was able to use the power of God to help."

"Yes. That's true. I just don't want to get our hopes up here, but you're right. We may just have the greatest miracle man walking the earth right here in our midst. He may not only hold the keys of knowledge, but he may hold the keys to you being whole again."

"There's only one way to find out. You've got to ask him. If he heals me, then I'll know for sure that he is the apostle."

"Well, I don't think I'd be struck down for asking. It's worth a try, but he told me to come back in a week to continue the lesson."

"Did he tell you that you couldn't talk to him for a week?"

"No."

"Since the man drank coffee at Denny's, he probably also eats. Why don't you go see him tomorrow and invite him over for dinner? We could ask him then."

"It's worth a try," I said.

That night I was lucky if I got two hours sleep. I had never felt such restless anticipation.

The next morning I took a little shopping trip. Sure enough, there he was, ringing his bell near the entrance of Albertsons. As I approached our eyes met. He smiled a brief, fatherly smile at me.

"I had to come to the store to get a couple of things," I said. It wasn't really a lie. There were a couple of things I needed.

John's countenance became more serious. "I suppose you have to do all the shopping since your wife is unable to."

"How did you know about my wife?"

"Not only did I give you some of my memories, but I caught a glimpse of some of yours. You love your wife very much, don't you?"

"Yes. Very much."

"I was in your situation almost two thousand years ago. My wife became deathly ill and I had to watch her waste away. There was nothing I could do. It still bothers me, even after all this time."

"You mean you performed all those miracles and you couldn't heal your own wife?" I felt a sinking feeling that he may not be able to help Elizabeth.

"Yes. Through me, God healed hundreds of people I didn't even know, but the woman I loved was beyond my power."

"It almost sounds like God is cruel," I said bitterly.

"Not really," John said with understanding and empathy. "There is always love if we see the big picture. All pain and all illness exists to either guide or teach us. If we do not learn the lesson from the disease, then the disease will either continue or change form until we die. Even though my wife was a great lady, she was also stubborn. She was unable to accept the change necessary to be healed. In some ways, I think I suffered more than she did."

"I know the feeling," I said softly.

"Many of the people that Jesus and the disciples healed got their illnesses back because they did not make the necessary corrections in their lives. Some of these people turned into our enemies and sought our lives. Others were permanently healed and were faithful to the end."

John paused and looked at me with great earnestness: "You've come to ask me to heal your wife, haven't you?"

I was amazed by his perception, but then replied, "Yes. Is it possible? She is supposed to be incurable."

"Remember what the Master said. *All things are possible.*"

"Will you do it then?"

"I will let you know what I can do after I meet her. I sense she wants to meet me, to know if I am for real."

"She asked me to invite you over for dinner. How about tonight?"

"Can you pick me up here about six?"

"I'll be here."

John was waiting for me at six. After getting in the car, I said, "You know I have a million questions for you."

"That is a good sign," he said. "The asking of questions is the beginning of knowledge. You'd be surprised how many people would have no questions even if God himself were to appear before them."

"You're kidding! If a source of knowledge like you is available, then you would think the average guy would be spilling over, asking all kinds of things."

"Many people are afraid of the truth, even among those who claim to be seekers and teachers. When you come face-to-face with undeniable truth, you must either conform to it or live your life as a hypocrite. Because people resist change they resist truth. That is why few people have more than two or three questions they would ask, even if they knew for sure they could get correct answers."

"I must not be average. I must have hundreds of questions!"

"That's the way it is. You are either afraid of truth and do not want to know more than your comfort zone will allow, or you are open to truth and change and your range of inquiry is infinite."

"Since it is good that I have questions, will you answer them?"

"You can ask anything you want. I will either answer your questions or I will not. It is that simple. Some things you are meant to discover on your own. Others are hidden from you for a purpose. Certain other mysteries you are meant to discover at a certain time and in a certain place."

"Let's start with this. You do eat, don't you, since you're coming to dinner?"

"Yes," John laughed. "I live each rejuvenated life as an ordinary mortal. I am as dependent on food as you are."

"Are you a vegetarian or do you live on a special diet?"

"In ideal circumstances I would be a vegetarian, but right now I try to eat a common sense diet. I do what is necessary to keep my vehicle strong and vital."

"Your vehicle?"

"Yes. I was referring to my body."

"Ahhh. Well, since the Bible says you were a fisherman, I thought we would serve you salmon. Does that sound OK?"

"Salmon is good," he smiled.

As we walked in the house Elizabeth was waiting in her wheelchair in the dining room. "So this must be the mystery man." She had a friendly, yet skeptical look in her eye.

John met her hand with a shake and said: "And you are Elizabeth -- a woman of grace, strength and beauty. Do I look familiar to you?"

Elizabeth looked puzzled: "I'm not sure. Why?"

"As we talk, it will seem to you that you know me." He looked toward the kitchen. "Is there anything I can do to help with the meal?"

"Can you make a salad?" I asked.

"My specialty," he said proudly.

"Good. I'll put you to work while I sizzle the salmon steaks."

CHAPTER SEVEN

Questions

As John and I were preparing dinner, Elizabeth was sitting in her wheelchair at the dining room table. I sensed that she was uncomfortable with the idea that we were having company and that she was unable to do anything to help. She was getting to the point that if she got any worse she would have to have someone stay with her all the time. She was still insisting that I go out and work my normal schedule and that she could take care of herself, but I was beginning to feel uneasy about her.

I looked her direction. "Sweetie... Do you have any questions you want to ask John?"

"You guys go ahead and finish putting the meal on, and I'll let John have it then."

I looked at John. "Do you drink wine?"

"A little now and then."

"How about some Gewurztraminer? It's our favorite for special occasions."

"You have good taste."

"I was a little nervous in offering it to you. After all, your contemporary, John the Baptist, was supposed to eat nothing but locusts and honey."

"But when he was in prison, he ate whatever they gave him. Every food, every element in the universe, is good and beneficial if taken in the right portions, in the right combinations, and bad when the limit is crossed. Quinine is a good example. It has been added in minute amounts to drinks for many years, but is deadly if any substantial amount is taken.

"Research now shows that moderate amounts of alcohol have a beneficial effect on the heart. Even cigarettes, if taken in small doses, like just two or three a week, could have a beneficial stimulation to the system for some. The trouble with them is that very few people have the self-control to limit their intake on these and other habit-forming substances."

"How about pot? How is that beneficial?"

"Pot, as you call it, is a medicine and should be administered by a knowledgeable healer. It should not be used on a regular basis without the advice of a physician or spiritual teacher. Overuse can have the negative effect of weakening the power of the will and delaying the correct use of the energy centers in the head. Extreme overuse can cause physical and other problems."

"Interesting," I said. John and I took the food to the table. "Looks like we are about ready to dine. Elizabeth tells me that I make the best salmon steaks there are."

"Looks as good as anything the French can dream up," John said. "And salmon is very good for Elizabeth's diet."

"Let me propose a toast," I said, as I raised my glass. "May the truth always prevail."

"A great toast," John replied, smiling. "That is not the first time I have heard you propose it, nor will it be the last." He saw a question mark in my eyes. "Don't ask me to explain that remark yet... May the truth always prevail," he said.

John and I drank deeply. I always filled Elizabeth's wineglass about half-full so she could drink with her shaking hands. Still, she spilled a couple of drops. "Excuse me," she said, wiping herself with a napkin.

"No problem," said John. "Didn't you promise to interrogate me?"

"Yes, I do have some questions."

"This may be somewhat of a special occasion." John interrupted. "This is the first time I have opened myself up to questions with knowledge of my identity on the table for several hundred

years."

Elizabeth set her fork down and wiped her mouth. "So, you really think you are John the Beloved? Tell me in your own words who you are. This is such a fantastic claim I want to hear it from your own mouth."

John leaned forward and looked at Elizabeth thoughtfully. "The Beloved was a term originated by one of my students, and for some reason it stuck and I was called the *disciple that Jesus loved* in the final edition of the Gospel of John. I did not feel at the time that I deserved any such title. In many ways, back then I was somewhat immature and fell short as a disciple of the Master. All of us betrayed Him in some degree. Someday, I will tell you why Jesus chose me to wander the earth until He comes again. In a way, it has been a great honor, and has had many rewards, yet in another way it has been very difficult."

"What do you mean you all betrayed Him in some degree?" asked Elizabeth. "I thought you were all holy men."

"Jesus was the only holy man among us, and even that was not obvious until one looked below the surface. The disciples were much more ordinary than any of the churches would ever want you to believe. The twelve apostles were not much more out of the ordinary than a group of salesmen at a convention. The only thing we had in common was a desire to learn the deeper mysteries. We were also attracted to the power Jesus had and wanted Him to share it with us, but our motives were not entirely pure.

"At one point we let jealousy overcome us and accused Jesus of being a glory seeker. We told him that He needed to let us do and take credit for some of the miracles, so He would be forced to stay humble. Now I see, on reflection, that it was we who needed to be humbled. He was just doing the job He came to do, and it attracted attention. At the time we felt like we deserved attention just as much as Jesus did, and we wanted our share."

"Well, if you are the Apostle and this is true, why are you telling us? I would think you would want to keep anything negative about your history under your hat," Elizabeth said matter-of-factly.

"That was our basic attitude when we related the story of the Gospel to students that was finally written down in permanent form. We were somewhat defensive when the story of how we deserted Jesus on the night of his arrest kept surfacing. None of the eleven remaining apostles wanted that to go in a permanent record, but the truth was out about it shortly after the resurrection and there was no suppressing it. Peter suffered the most, however, because Jesus actually predicted he would deny him three times before the cock would crow. Many ignorant people thought he did not deserve to be a leader because of this act, and some who were jealous of his position even crowed like a rooster when he walked by so as to remind him of his mistake. Peter suffered great pain because of his error, yet he also performed the greatest of miracles among us.

John continued: "To answer your question *why do I reveal my past weakness?* For two reasons. Joseph will write about our conversations, and in this round I must reveal the truth about the humanity of the little group who followed the Master. In the past, we tried to portray ourselves as greater than we were. Second, I want you to realize that I am just a human being like yourselves. I have many answers, but not all the answers. I have some power available, but not all power. I would rather give you more than you expect, rather than less."

I asked John if he wanted more salmon, and he happily accepted. My interest in John increased by the minute.

"So, how would you rate yourself now?" Elizabeth asked. "Have you made some progress?"

"I appreciate that question. Yes, I have made a lot of progress. Back in those days, I was like a kid in a candy store. Now, I'm more like the father who had too much candy as a kid deciding how much candy his own child should have. My perspective and judgment is much improved. Even so, I cannot just blurt out the few mysteries of the universe that I know. Higher knowledge cannot just be poured into you like placing data into a computer. To be fully understood, it must be verified through a person's own soul.

"And what is the difference between lower and higher knowledge?" Elizabeth asked.

"Lower knowledge deals with facts and can be used as soon as it is memorized -- like how to spell certain words or the multiplication tables. Seven times seven is forty-nine. As soon as anyone memorizes this, he can use it in the practical world.

"Higher knowledge deals with principles and requires a certain attuning with the spiritual self to be able to apply it. For instance, anyone can learn how to write down musical notes, but to compose a beautiful and original melody requires an attuning with music itself. Anyone can memorize a scale of notes, but only the person who is in tune with music can come close to understanding the principle behind music and write original scores.

"So the first key, which is WHO OR WHAT AM I? cannot just be told to us," Elizabeth concluded.

"That is correct. You must tune into it to understand the meaning. My job is to merely guide you in the right direction. I am like the person coaching the songwriter. I could say to such a person: 'That doesn't even sound like music. Try again,' or, 'That sounds beautiful and stirs my soul. Keep on writing.' I will know within myself when you have reached the required level of understanding."

"Interesting," said Elizabeth. (I was just sitting back, relaxing and enjoying watching Elizabeth give John an interrogation.) "Now I have some real questions for you," she mused.

"Ask on," John replied, obviously pleased with Elizabeth's curiosity.

Elizabeth reached into the pocket of her skirt and pulled out a list. "Here they are:

"One: What is the meaning of life? Two: Where did we come from? Why are we here and where are we going? Three: How much of the Bible is really true? Four: Is there a true church? And if there is, which one is it? Five: Is there reincarnation? Six: Is Christ really coming again? If so, when? Seven: When did the universe begin, and when will it end? Eight: Who or what is God, and why is He not doing something constructive on the earth today? It looks to me like He doesn't care much about starving children, for instance. Nine: Does this earth have any future

awaiting it, or is there going to be some dark apocalypse where life as we know it will cease to exist? Ten: Why does God allow suffering, disease and untimely death? What father would let his children suffer as some of us have to? If God is really a loving God, it just doesn't make sense. Take me, for instance. I know I'm not perfect, but there are a lot of rapists and murderers out there who are in much better physical shape than I am. Why am I punished and not them?"

John smiled. "That's an impressive list of questions. Did you think them up yourself?" he asked.

"My husband and I thought them up last night when we sort of brainstormed."

"For several reasons I will only give you so much at a time. I will take one question from you tonight. Pick the one that means the most to you."

"I think you know which one that is," Elizabeth said evenly.

"That could be." John said. "Nevertheless, you must clearly state your question."

"Why is that?" she protested.

"There is a principle governing the transmission of higher principles. Have you heard the statement by Jesus in the Bible where he says: *Ask and you shall receive?*"

"I believe so."

"If you want to know any mystery, you must ask and know what you are asking. The one being asked must know what is being asked, and the one who is asking must be willing to receive if the answer is given."

"And if I reject the answer?"

"Then it will be as if the question was never asked," John replied.

"I'm not sure if you are really John the Beloved, but at least you are unusual... How do I know if I am ready for the answer?"

"When you are ready to consider anything, no matter how crazy it sounds," said John.

"So the answer to number ten could be that God is really a spoiled cosmic brat who is torturing us like a kid who sticks pins in bees and pulls wings off flies?"

"You never know," John said wryly.

"OK. I will not guarantee I am ready, but here's the question. It's number ten."

"Articulate the question," said John.

"OK. I'll repeat it." Elizabeth shifted in her wheelchair. "Why does God allow suffering, disease and untimely death? Why do some innocent children die? Why do some of us suffer with painful disease, and others who deserve to suffer seem to be vibrant and healthy?"

"I'll answer at least part of your question," said John. "In particular, you want to know why you suffer with such a dread disease when you have been basically a good person and do not deserve such pain. You wonder why your life will seemingly be cut short while other people can gracefully grow old with their partners. Is that what you want to know?"

"Basically, yes."

"I will give you a partial answer now and more later when you have additional pieces to the puzzle. Can you accept this?"

"I suppose so. Go ahead. Show me what you've got."

I smiled at Elizabeth's spunkiness and looked at John with great anticipation for the answer.