

CHAPTER 22

To one side of the flat rock, the firstfruits of the harvest had been placed. Grouped to the other side were those who controlled the everyday management of the town. At one time, that would have comprised Peter Kharkov and his officers. Dar looked for him, but he was nowhere to be seen. The sardonic features of Alexei Chernov surveyed him from across the open space and he was flanked by some of the other officers. Dar was quite sure that Martha had also seen their spectacular arrival. He reminded himself that it was the Firstling who counted.

He was puzzled, there was no sign of Carl. He was the last person he would have expected to be absent from such an important occasion. The noise from the crowd subsided, as did the surges of movement that indicated fresh arrivals. When they were quiet and still, the Firstling started to speak.

"This is the ninth occasion upon which we have come before the face of Our Father to thank Him for His wonderful bounty. The tithe portion of the firstfruits has grown larger on each of these occasions. The blessing has been greater. Your numbers have grown as more and more flow into this city, which has become a haven of peace, a refuge from the hardships of former times.

Yet, there have been others who have left, reaching out beyond the limits of that which you have planted. It is a reminder to us that man has always sought that which was beyond the boundaries, both natural and spiritual. It is also a reminder that the Kingdom of Peace is not governed by artificial boundaries and limitations, and that it is not constricted and confined within the narrow concepts of man.

You have been told that the Kingdom is one entity and is not divided into many principalities or governments. There is only one King of Kings and Lord of Lords and He does not reign over a divided kingdom. A single Firstling is not given the task to preside over a portion of the whole, Nor are they in competition or rivalry with each other. Rather, we are one, and our mind is one with Him who is Lord of all.

The Kingdom is the sum of many parts, just as the human body is the sum of each of the cells from which it is built. Where the soul of man is, there is also the kingdom. The boundaries of the Kingdom are infinite, there is no end and there are no divisions. It is of no significance that one soul may be in the flesh and another has departed the flesh. That is a human consideration, governed by the limitations of your own human senses - it is not a Godly limitation and it is not a barrier for the Kings and the Priests, into whose hands the Kingdom has been given. The Kingdom is not measured by where the souls reside, for if that was to be the case, then the greater portion of the kingdom would be among those who have entered eternity through the ages, rather than with those who still live.

When the millennium comes to a close, the critical division will not be between those portions that comprise the souls still in the flesh and those who have departed the flesh, rather, the division will be between those, both the living and the dead, who remain loyal to the King of Kings and those who side with the released power of evil, which is called Satan.

The injunction of Jesus applies now as it will then: 'Fear the Second Death'. The essence of fearing the Second Death, is to be aware of its malignant danger and to have godfear, for having godfear means to fear the Second Death."

The Firstling paused as if he was waiting for some reaction. The crowd

was very still, it was Martha who broke the silence.

"There are some who would like to build a place of worship - a new temple. My group has been given the task to search the scriptures for the way in which our society is to behave. We have read again the instructions given in the books of the law, to those who received the commission to be the priests for the people of Israel. Is this the way we are to worship in the future, or do you have some other direction?"

The Firstling's voice was very gentle when he responded.

"Jesus, our Lord once answered a similar question in this way: 'but you have overlooked weightier matters of the Law, justice, mercy and good faith. It is these you should have practised, without neglecting the others. Blind guides! You strain off a midge, yet gulp down a camel!' I say to you who have been given a little task, do not be blind guides, nor clean the outside of cup and dish, which are filled inside by robbery and self-indulgence.

The heart of man is a vessel which can contain many things. It can contain a measure of pride and self importance, which is a form of self indulgence and it can contain a thieving spirit, which seeks to deprive others of that which they value. Your commission was to search the scriptures for the ways which would prevent disease and for simple regulations to serve for the good of all. You have no commission to establish ways of worship, or for the construction of a temple, or to so regulate the lives of the people that they feel imprisoned. The Kingdom is a place of freedom without indulgence, it is a place where the curse of the earth has been removed, where man can again work without fighting the thorns and thistles. I will remind you that thorns and thistles can be unnecessary restrictions as also are regulations. The Kingdom is not a place where you are to be bound but rather, where you are to find liberty.

You must understand the nature of the Kingdom of Peace. There are some amongst you who have said in their hearts: 'Why isn't everything now perfect, why are some still disadvantaged? Why isn't everybody living under their own vine and figtree? Why are the ruined places unrepaired? Surely God could have made everything perfect in the first moments of the Kingdom?

This is how you try to measure the Kingdom. I will answer to these questions by asking another: 'Is the Kingdom to be measured by fine houses and the luxuries that you might have enjoyed in earlier days? Did those fine houses and luxuries lead you to peace, or did you strive more and more, no matter how much you accumulated? Were you content with what you had? I ask again: What is the nature of the Kingdom?' I will give you the answer. The nature of the Kingdom is governed by that which is in your hearts. We have been taught - the Kingdom of Heaven is within. If, within your hearts, you are asking such questions, or allowing critical thoughts, can it be said that the Kingdom of Peace is really established in your hearts? Is the nature of the Kingdom in your hearts?

The Kingdom of Peace cannot find its complete outward expression, until it is established within the hearts of those who are its citizens. The Father has provided the mechanism, He has accelerated the sequence of seedtime and harvest. You will not hunger or thirst in the natural sense and everything will be provided. Your communities will be protected under the Godly hand. There will never come a harvest time when you can't come together, as we have done on this occasion, to give thanks for the bounty of the Father.

In the Kingdom of Peace, there will be no need for ritual or a temple, for that reason the temple has been removed. In the time of David, God

said: 'Your son whom I shall set on the throne in your place will build the house in honour of my name.' To Solomon the builder, God said: 'As for this house which you are building, if you are obedient to my ordinances and conform to my precepts and loyally observe all my commands, then I will fulfil my promise to you, the promise I gave to your father David, and I will dwell among the Israelites and never forsake my people Israel.'

These ancient reasons for a temple have passed, the Apostle Paul told the Corinthians: 'Surely you know that you are God's temple, where the Spirit of God dwells. Anyone who destroys God's temple will himself be destroyed by God. because the temple of God is holy: and that temple you are.'

I repeat what I said: The outward expression of the Kingdom of Peace, will be governed by the presence of the Kingdom of Peace within each individual. The Kingdom of Peace is characterised by the presence of Jesus and His Firstlings amongst you. We have no need for earthly food or clothing. We do not need a dwelling within which to live, but if we can live in the peaceful temple of your hearts, that then becomes a finer temple than anything that could be devised by the thoughts of man.

If the exaltation of joy and thankfulness and love for the Father, is present in your hearts, then that is worship that could not be expressed by methods and rituals.

Have thankful hearts and rejoice in the bounty of your Father, Who loves you. Is there one in this city who is in need? Is there one who is hungry? Is there one who is naked? You have the full measure but there are still some who have not the full measure. There are some who still need in one thing or the other. Do you have the thought that they must take care of themselves? Has not the Father given you everything? Would you be so hard-hearted that you would say that it is their problem to find the full

measure?

Your thankfulness is not expressed only by bringing the firstfruits of your fields and seeking a blessing upon them. You already know that this brings you prosperity. Now, I say to you that you must extend your thankfulness by giving freely to those who do not have the full measure. I have already told you that there will be no selfish hoarding from out of greed, whilst another goes hungry or unclothed. Jesus once told his followers: 'I hungered and you did not give me to eat, I thirsted and you did not give me to drink' They asked him: 'When did you hunger and when did you thirst?', and He answered: 'What you do unto the least of mine, you do unto me'.

Now, give freely to those who do not have enough. Give freely to a young man who has shared his tunic to protect the modesty of his helpmate, and to the strangers who are outside of your city and have need of cloth to cover them."

Total confusion reigned in Dar's mind, he didn't dare to look at the girl at his side. The Firstling had called her his helpmate - it wasn't possible for the Firstling to make such a mistake. He looked up into the face of the Kingly-Priest and met a gentle smile. The Firstling nodded.

"I made no error, I know your hearts, they are one with each other. The blessings of the Father shall abide with you. Go in peace to your people. It might be a surprise to you but they have found the courage to follow you, for you would not have the strength to carry back that which has been given to you in love."

They got to their feet in a daze and the crowd opened to let them pass. Hand in hand, they walked through, whilst those nearest reached out to touch them. At the edge of the crowd, they looked back and found that the crowd had swirled back into place. They walked silently into the street that led back

to the forest. The moon began to flood the road and the ruined houses like sunlight.

Dar stopped and looked down at his new wife. She stared back at him without speaking at first, then she whispered:

"Do you mind very much, perhaps you didn't want a wife. I won't hinder you if you would rather go on somewhere else, or, if you wish it, I could come with you - I won't get in the way."

Dar took her shoulders between his hands and stared down into her face.

"I thought it was you that might object, that's why I never said anything to you, I thought it was too soon, but I've wanted this to happen since I first saw you."

She stared back into the face of this bearded young man, who had so recently come into her life and wondered how it could be possible that she was now the wife of this stranger.

The moon made the street as bright as day, it was like the rising sun and the night was banished. From higher up the road came the soft shuffle of bare feet on what was left of the original paving. With the rising of the moon, Bordo and his men had abandoned all pretence of stealth. He drew extra courage from the sight of the young couple standing motionless and staring into each other's faces. It was clear that they were under no threat or duress. It wasn't so clear what they thought they were doing, standing motionless in the middle of the street of a strange town. He shelved that question for a more opportune time. He called softly.

"Dar - Merle -"

They turned and moved to join the timorous group of Gatherers. Bordo shrugged his shoulders in dejection.

"I see that you failed."

"No, Bordo, we didn't fail - we didn't even have to ask - we were given, but I suggest we start looking and we shall find what the Firstling had in mind."

They searched the street methodically, working their way back towards the edge of the town. As the distance lengthened between themselves and the town square and they found nothing, Dar began to wonder if he had missed something in the directions they had been given by the Firstling. There could have been something that was said that had been overlooked in the emotional turmoil of finding himself united to a wife he hardly knew. If that was the case, a hurried discussion with Merle failed to reveal it.

At the very fringe of the town, where the cultivated fields touched against the last buildings, they came upon a large cache of bales. Bordo stared at it nonplussed.

"I'd be ready to swear on a stack of bibles that that wasn't there when we passed earlier."

"It was pitch dark and we were more interested in hiding ourselves."

One of the other men interjected.

"Would you look at that pile!"

Dar murmured softly.

"Would you look at the love it represents - the hours of work someone has put into weaving that cloth - and all given to us freely!"

Bordo cleared his throat.

"I'm sure we're all very grateful - "

"I didn't get much opportunity for religion when I was a child - and there was only once or twice that I could go to Sunday School - my father threw a fit when he found out - but I always remember the story they told on

one occasion about those who wanted to throw a feast - it was one of the teachings of Jesus, I think - He told His followers to call the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind, when they had a feast, because that way they would be blessed, because those people couldn't repay the invitation, but they could expect to be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

Bordo had a return of nervousness, he looked around warily.

"Let's get out of here before we get into trouble!"

"You won't get into trouble - these people are friendly!"

"That might be right and it might be wrong - I don't like cities."

Dar sighed in exasperation, it would take a long time with some, before they created the Kingdom of Peace in their own hearts. As they toiled up the slope through the first of the trees of the forest, Dar thought over the words they had heard and especially the response that had been given to Martha. He could feel no victory over the fact that she had been put firmly in her place and told to concentrate on what she had been given to do, rather than interfering in matters that were not her concern. He knew Martha well enough to be sure that she would interpret that rebuke in the way that suited her best and that things would never change until someone took the task away from her. That led him to think of Uncle Carl. Where could he have been? What could have withheld him from such an important occasion?

The group paused as they topped the crest of the hills that flanked the new city. Dar looked back, the whole landscape was bathed in a silvery light so brilliant that it resembled the day. It was a clear light, everything was in sharp definition. The ruined buildings stood out sharply, casting long, black shadows. Beyond the city was the ocean, a shimmer of silver and black, stretching empty, to the curved horizon. Bordo's call was soft but imperative, the Clan Leader didn't like dawdlers.

They had left the women and children deep in the woods, in the company of some of the older men. Another soft call brought them out from between the black shadows of the trees. They had lit no fires, Bordo had decided that it would be too revealing so close to the town. The silver light was intense but there was no warmth in it, Dar could see how they shivered in the cooler mountain air. He wondered how he could ever teach them to trust, especially with a leader such as Bordo, and then he was surprised with himself, for it was the first time that he had ever considered it to be his task to teach them anything.

Bordo displayed the bales of cloth they had carried from the town. It was noticeable that little attention was given to the fact that it had been Dar and Merle who had risked themselves in the venture. It began to look like the inspection of the trophies of a war party. Dar retreated to one side with his arms folded across his chest. Merle stood slightly apart, still clad in his tunic. Eventually, Bordo made a grudging gesture towards them.

"I'm sure we are all thankful to Dar and Merle for interceding with the Firstling."

There was a murmur of agreement.

"There was no intercession - the Firstling had it all arranged before we even entered the town, perhaps before we even thought about going to the town."

Whilst it was still fresh in his mind, Dar plunged into a condensed version of what they had heard from the mouth of the Kingly-Priest. He stopped short before mentioning the new relationship that now existed between Merle and himself. The Group of Gatherers stood motionless in the silver light and listened, even Bordo surrendered his authority for the moment. It was quickly reasserted when Dar came to the end of his recitation.

"So, this Martha woman was put in her place, was she? Does that mean you'll be going back to them?"

"If that's what you want!"

"I want nothing, I'm just asking a question. When we found you, you told us that the reason why you left the town, was this woman - now, it sounds as if she's had her wings clipped."

Dar response was measured.

"There are some in the Kingdom of Peace who find it very hard to learn the new ways. Martha is one of them. She'll find a way of carrying on what she's doing and still making it fit with what she was told. Jesus once said that there were none so deaf as those who didn't want to hear!"

The comment went over the top of Bordo's head.

"So, you intend to stay then?"

"Unless you want me to go - now that I've served my purpose!"

"And what does that mean?"

Dar pointed to the cloth.

"You've got what you wanted and you don't need my advice anymore - perhaps it's time for me to go on my way."

Bordo hesitated, it was said like a challenge.

"I thought you were content with us."

"I'm content enough - "

"We have no rules and regulations - "

"I didn't say I wanted to leave - I asked if you still wanted me around."

"You're welcome to stay - or you're welcome to go - it's up to you. you'll have to feed yourself - unless you're sick - that's the only rule we have - there are no servants here!"

"Well, it's not the most gracious invitation I've ever received and if it

comes to that, I can feed myself without being part of your group."

"That's for you to decide. You like your freedom, so you are free to make up your own mind."

Bordo gestured to the rest of the group to take up the bales of cloth. He had the look of a man who expected to be jumped upon by slave-traders. Dar shook his head in exasperation. He grinned at Merle, who managed to summon up a flicker of a smile in response.

"Bordo! There's one other thing. I didn't tell you all the story - "

Bordo's eyes narrowed.

"Oh?"

"Yes - Merle and me - You ought to know that we were married whilst we were there!"

Bordo exhaled slowly.

"Married?"

"That's right."

"And how did you go about this - marriage - or shouldn't I ask?"

Dar took his time to enlighten him.

"We were blessed by the Firstling - do you think that's good enough for your community?"

Bordo looked sharply at Merle.

"Is he telling the truth?"

She nodded.

"The Firstling united us and blessed us - "

"And you agree with it?"

Again, she nodded.

"Dar is my man - and if he says we leave the Clan - then - then I'll go with him."

Bordo gave her a hard, long look and then nodded.

"Please yourself, Merle. The same thing applies to you, you can go, or you can stay - it's your choice."