

John had lived in the holy city of Jerusalem all of his life. He loved its ancient history, although it was not for its history that he lived there. He recognized that, as the capital of a vassal Roman state, it had lost its central place in the great powers of the world, but he did not live there for its power. He frequently spent his days, as he was planning to do today, meditating in the sacred precincts of the temple, but it was not even for the temple that he lived there. John lived in Jerusalem because he had a dream, a dream which centered around personal holiness, and Jerusalem helped bring him closer to holiness.

Since John was a boy learning the scriptures from his father he had been fascinated by the accounts of God's appearances to man. He had listened with deep attention to the stories of Moses, Jacob, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, who had seen God, or even stood in His presence. John felt that the very purpose of religious observance was to prepare one's self to be with God, and his life-long pursuit had been toward that end.

As he had grown and learned more about the religious environment in which he lived he had found that the Pharisees offered the vision closest to his own regarding personal worthiness. And so he had worked to be of all Pharisees the most righteous. He knew every point of the Law of Moses and was scrupulous in his observance. He strove to keep himself pure in every way, and adhered to all the rituals of his faith. He watched as others became caught up in political questions or pursued positions of power, but he knew that was not his quest. He single-heartedly dedicated himself to the ideal of personal righteousness.

Lately he had started to feel in his heart, during his many prayers and long hours spent in the temple, that he was approaching that long-desired goal. He had not heard the voice of God speaking to him, but he still felt that he was close to the opportunity he so desired to stand in the presence of God and behold His face. Even this very day, as he climbed the temple hill, his heart was beating faster than the exertion of walking could explain. Somehow he knew that his great moment was approaching. He could not explain the source of this surety, but he could not deny it. On most days he was able to make this journey with scarcely an awareness of the throngs around him, yet perversely, even as he felt that he was somehow approaching God, he felt more aware of the crowds instead of shutting them out. He could not explain it; his epiphany should be a personal matter, but he felt the presence of those around him more and more strongly. Finally he stopped. How could the certainty of the presence of God and the nearness of other people

be growing at the same time?

As he stopped he finally focused on what people around him were saying, and caught the name that seemed to be on everyone's lips - "Jesus." Although John dedicated himself to his spiritual search, it was impossible to insulate himself entirely from worldly things, so he had heard the talk of Jesus, who some claimed was the Messiah of the Jews. John felt a certain disdain within himself. Let others seek after this preacher or that, speculating about the doom of the Romans and the political might of Israel. He felt himself above such things. Even as he stood in the flow of the excited crowd, he felt to exclaim "I am about to stand in the presence of God!"

Just then, someone brushed against him. His moment of religious ecstasy passed, and he realized it was that same street preacher who was standing right before him. He looked at the man named Jesus, and wondered at the intensity of his gaze. Couldn't the man see he was apart from such things? Then Jesus spoke: "Dost thou seek me, my son?"

John could hardly believe his ears. He had been ripped from his purpose, stopped as it were in his moment of truth, to face someone who appeared to be mad. The contrast was almost more than he could bear. With a scarcely muffled expression of impatience and revulsion, he turned from the man and stepped around him, more determined than ever to continue to the temple and recover his lost reverie. Surely in the holy temple God would hear his cry.