

The Choice

Head against the wall, Seth stretched out on the bench, relaxing after another working day on his neighbour's farm. The little house he and Abi shared, since the family had grown up and moved away, overlooked the great courtyard of his boss's house. Abi worked there most days. He watched the young man there as he pace slowly around the yard, then stop and sit down under the vine trellis, his head in his hands.

'Caleb hasn't gone then!'

'Did you really think he would?'

'No. I told you yesterday. Old Phineas has got the chain too tight on that lad. He'll not be going anywhere his father doesn't want.'

'It's all right for you to say 'I told you so''. Abi came over to him, carrying a jug of wine, 'But I thought it was going to be different this time.'

'How different?' he scoffed. Seth loved to be right. 'I told you. Nothing's going to change there.'

'But it **was** different,' Abi persisted. 'He was so excited. I was amazed when he said he'd defied his father and gone to hear the Rabbi. I don't think old Phineas could believe it. Deborah told me the air was blue when he got back. She said he was so full of what he heard, he burst in babbling about what Jesus had said. But his father shouted him down. She was outside the door when it happened...'

'Just like she's outside the door when anything happens in that house,' interrupted Seth.

'Deborah said she could hardly believe it, but Caleb raised his voice to his father and shouted, 'I don't care what you think. I'm going with them. I believe Jesus is probably the Messiah, and I want to be there when he sets up his Kingdom. It's going to be a kingdom where everything's fair, where there won't be rich and poor, and people will really care about each other.' He nearly knocked Deborah over when he rushed out. She said old Phineas tried to run after him, then stood puffing and blowing in the doorway. She said his face went purple and looked as though it was about to burst.'

'That explains why the old man didn't come out to the farm today,' Seth said. 'He was waiting for his face to settle down! But the boy hasn't gone, and from the way he's acting now, he's not in any hurry to leave.'

'He did go,' Abi came over to the wall by Seth where she could look down at Caleb. 'Poor lad. He was back in no time.'

'His father behind him with a big stick, no doubt.' Seth laughed.

'No. It wasn't his father who turned him back. It was Jesus. And not with a big stick, though I think Caleb could have taken that better. I was there when he got back. I could see the lad was near to tears, so I sat him down in the kitchen and let him tell me about it. He'd told the Rabbi about home, and how difficult Phineas was making it for him to leave. Jesus had just said, 'Is it really your father, or is it you?' Then he'd quoted that old saying 'Leave the dead to bury their dead.'

Seth laughed loudly this time. 'He's certainly got the measure of the boss. He's right about Caleb too. That lad had a chance to break free. Now he's lost it. A few years from now and he'll be just like his father. He'll be a boss somewhere. Down at the synagogue most likely. That'll suit him. He'll be just like the rest of the religious, giving orders; adjusting commandments to suit himself; having everything his way.'

'Seth,' Abi raised her voice. 'You're not being fair to the lad. He's good and kind. He much more like his mother than his father.'

'But he hasn't got what it takes to be a Messiah's man.' Seth snapped.

'You believe Jesus is the Messiah?' Abi stared at him.

'I'm not sure. But from what I've heard, he's a good man. He knows people and how they work. Look at those who've joined him. Can you really see Caleb living alongside Simon and James. He wouldn't last a day with them.'

'But there are others,' Abi countered. 'He'd got close to that Nathaniel from Cana. He's a quiet man like Caleb.'

'I bet he hasn't got a father like Phineas, though. Abi, Jesus is a revolutionary. Even talk about caring and loving your neighbours, makes enemies. Touring Galilee and having crowds follow you, may be exciting to a young lad like Caleb, but what about when those Pharisees get their beaks into the pie? What about sleeping rough and doing your own washing? It could even turn nasty. There could be fighting and prison, or even worse. If you want that sort of life you've got to be totally committed. Caleb's got the vision, and he's got it enough to defy his father, but that isn't his problem.'

'What is then?' Abi was tiring of the conversation. She knew it had to end with Seth's point of view.

Seth kept going. 'His problem is himself. He wants to please everybody, specially his father, but at heart he wants to please himself. He wants all that Jesus promises, but he wants it his way. He had a choice today. It wasn't between Jesus and Phineas. It was between Jesus and himself.'

Abi went back into the house. This time she had the last word. 'And there's someone I know who's just a bit like that too.'