

A Story of the Apostle John¹

Following the Fall of Jerusalem and after his return from exile, the Apostle John traveled widely encouraging and teaching the churches even at his advanced age. One account of the Apostle John's adventures following the fall of Jerusalem involved a young lad of ardent spirit that he noticed while visiting the church at Smyrna. He left the boy in the keeping of the Bishop "with all earnestness, in the presence of the church and Christ as my witness." The cleric took the boy home, brought him up, kept him in his presence, looked after him and finally gave him the grace of Baptism. After this he relaxed his constant care and watchfulness, having put the seal of the Lord on him for protection. The youngster snatched at liberty too soon and was led astray by a bad crowd of friends. Little by little he was led into their ways until he had renounced God's salvation and in his rebellion, feeling that his life was already in ruins, sought after more and more heinous crimes with which to impress his friends. He became their leader and formed them into a gang of bandits.

John had occasion to return to Smyrna one day and went to the Bishop saying, "Come now, bishop, repay me the deposit which Christ and I left in your keeping in the presence of the church over which you reside as my witness." The bishop replied, "He is dead to God," and then he told John the sad tale. John tore his clothes in grief saying, "A fine guardian I left of our brother's soul. However, fetch me a horse immediately." He rode off to the bandits' hide-out in the mountains. As he approached, the young man turned to flee out of shame, but John called out to him, "You still have hopes of life. I will account to Christ for you. If need be I will gladly die in your place, as Christ died for us; to save you I will give my own life. Stop! Believe! Christ sent me."

When he heard this, the young man stopped and threw down his weapons, breaking into tears. When the old man came to him he flung his arms around John, pleading for himself with groans as best he could, and baptized a second time with tears, he hid his sin-laden right hand from sight. But John solemnly pledged his word that he had found pardon for him from the Savior. He prayed, knelt down, and kissed the hidden hand, cleansed by repentance. Then he brought him back to the church, interceded for him with many prayers, shared with him the ordeal of continuous fasting, brought his mind under control by all the enchanting power of words, and did not leave him, we are told, till he had restored him to the Church, giving a perfect example of true repentance and a perfect proof of regeneration, the trophy of a visible resurrection.

¹ More likely, this is a story of the Elder John. The Apostle would have been in his 90's riding horseback. The story is taken from Eusebius, *The History of the Church* (Penguin, N.Y., 1981), pp. 129-131.