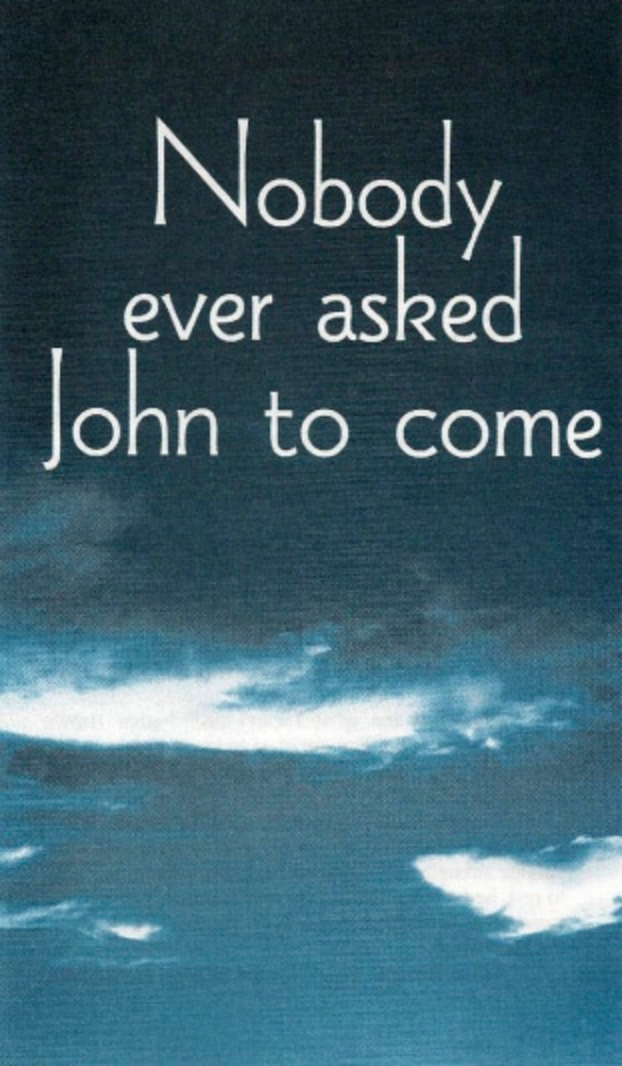


Nobody
ever asked
John to come

The background of the image is a photograph of a bright blue sky filled with soft, white, wispy clouds. The text is overlaid on the upper portion of the sky.

He was a blacksmith, and a most wretchedly wicked man. He hated everything that was good, and loved everything that was bad. He made himself an irritation to all whom believed in God, not even sparing his wife, who did the best she could in the patience and wisdom of Jesus. This man was given up as altogether beyond hope, and indeed, so he seemed. Prayer was made as though he didn't exist; churches never made any mention of him; the gospel was preached and mercy offered, but no one connected him with God's message to the world.

A few miles back in the country from the blacksmith's town, there lived an old couple, Father and Mother Brown. They were close to ninety years old. They had been a life of patient devotedness to God, and they were waiting without fear or sorrow for the promised Homecoming.

Very early one morning, the old man awoke, terribly agitated, and began to call his wife: "Get up, wife! Get up!"

"Why, old man," she said, "what is the matter?"

He answered: "I must start a fire in the kitchen. I want you to get breakfast ready as soon as you can; for I've got to go to town this morning." "You go to town this morning!" she exclaimed. "Why, are you out of your head? You haven't any way to get there, and I know you can't walk!"

"Don't tell me what I can't do," Father Brown persisted. "I tell you, I've got to go to town. I had a dream last night, and...well, I'll go and make the fire, then tell you about it."

When the meal was over, he started for town. It was a long and weary way for an old man to walk, but some strange strength was supplied him, and without stopping to rest, he kept on. The village was reached. Through the main street he trudged, then into the shop of "Devil John," the blacksmith.

"Father Brown!" he exclaimed in great amazement,

"what are you doing here, and so early in the morning?"

The old man answered: "That's just what I've come to tell you. Let's go inside where I can sit down, for I am tired."

Together they went into the shop, and when seated, the old man said: "John, I had a dream last night, and I've come to tell you about it. I dreamed that the hour I have thought about so much and tried to keep ready for was come. It was my time to die. And it was just as the Lord promised it would be. I wasn't the least bit afraid. How could I be? My room was full of angels and they all spoke to me, and I loved them. Then some of them stooped and slipped their arms under me and away we went. Beyond the clouds we mounted through the starry skies. Oh, how they sang! I never heard anything like it in my life. On we swept, 'till one of them said: 'Look yonder, now; there's Heaven!'

"Oh, John, I can't tell you how I felt when I was in sight of Heaven; nor can I tell you what I saw. It was so beautiful, so pure, and so glorious! As we drew nearer, I saw the gates swing open and we swept through them into the City. Such a welcome! Such gladness! It was in the fragrance of the flowers, in the music of every harp, in the grasp of every hand, because I had come.

"I found all my children there — not one of them lost — my boy that you used to play with was there, and your old mother was there. And after a time — I don't know how long it was — I saw the same angels who brought me, bring another; and it was my dear, sweet wife. And I saw angels bringing in others — others that we both love. And so the years of eternity rolled.

"Then, John, all at once it came to me that I hadn't seen you anywhere. I set out to look for you, but could get no trace of you. I was distressed more than you can know; and I went to the Lord, my precious Saviour, and asked Him where you were. And, oh, that you could have seen His face when He told me that you hadn't come. 'Not

come!' I said. 'Why hadn't John come?' And He wept, as I suppose He often did when He was down here, and said, 'Nobody ever asked John to come.'

"Oh, I fell at His feet. I bathed them with my tears and cried, 'Blessed Lord! Just let me out of here half an hour, and I'll go and ask him to come. I'll give him an invitation.' And right then and there I woke up. I was so glad that I was alive so I could come and ask you to go to Heaven, and now here I am."

The old man gave the royal invitation but the blacksmith stood as one petrified. He could not speak nor move.

Father Brown got up, and saying, "Good-bye, John: remember, you've got the invitation: you have been asked to come." He took his cane and started home.

The blacksmith seemed to come to himself, and as one recovering from a trance, he set out to pursue the labors of the day. But everything went wrong: the hammers wouldn't strike right, the nails wouldn't go in right, and the horses would not stand right. "Oh, God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" he began to sob at last, and leaving the shop, he went home. He told his wife of Father Brown's visit. "Blessed be God!" she said. "We'll send the horse and buggy and have him come back!" "Yes," he added, "for I mean to accept the invitation!"

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

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