

John: A Son of Thunder but a Brother of Love

Sovereign Grace Baptist

August 27, 2005

Luke 6:12-14

“And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. 13 And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles; 14 Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John...”

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“What say you, friends? That this is John of Ephesus who has gone back to His kingdom? Aye, ‘tis so, ‘tis so; I know it all: and yet, just now I seemed to stand once more upon my native hills and touch my Master. Up! Bear me to my church once more. There let me tell them of a Savior’s love: For by the sweetness of my Master’s voice I think He must be very near So raise up, my head: How dark it is! I cannot seem to see the faces of my flock. Is that the sea that murmurs so, or is it weeping? Hush my little children. God so loved the world He gave His Son: So love ye one another, Love God and men. Amen.”

With these words the poet Eastwood described the last hours of St. John’s life—and what a life it was. The gospel narrative introduces John as one of the sons of Zebedee, a fisherman of Galilee. When not engaged in the hard work of the fishing trade, John along with his friend Andrew would go to hear the zealous preacher called John the Baptist (John 1:34-40).

“What eventful days they were that John spent amid the crowd at Jordan, as he listened to the mighty preaching of the Baptist who had caught something of the spirit and power of Elijah! How deeply impressed John was by the strong character and forceful teaching of the Baptist!” (Herbert Lockyer).

Then, one day, into the presence of John the Baptist, Jesus walked.

The man sent from God,

the one who ate locust and wild honey,

and spoke with the voice of ultimate spiritual authority,

gazed with blazing eyes upon Christ.

Suddenly pointing to Him the Baptist cried out saying *“Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).*

John, the son of Zebedee was among the first to look and then to follow the Lamb. It was a glorious consolation for John to see Him whom kings and prophets longed to see (Matt. 13:17; Luke 10:24; Heb. 11:13).

St. Augustine said he wished to see Solomon in his glory,

Paul in the pulpit, and Christ in the flesh.

In the pastoral exhortation of John the Baptist to look at Christ, every word is significant.

Behold! Here is a summons to the world to, look to Christ. Whatever your need may be, look to Christ. No one has ever been told to look to science or psychology or to self. Hearts must look to Christ. Here is a summary of the gospel ministry. “*We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord*” (2 Cor. 4:5). Behold the object of faith is Christ.

Behold the Lamb. John could have said, “*Look to the King of kings and Lord of lords.*”

He could have said, “*Behold the Sovereign of the universe.*”

He could have said, “*Behold the Judge of all righteousness,*” but John said, “*Behold, the Lamb.*”

This was the name given by the Holy Spirit to mark the Messiah out as The Sacrifice. According to prophecy “*He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth*” (Isaiah 53:7).

The emblem of the Lamb was chosen because it speaks of innocence, meekness, and patience (1 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 5:5). But this was no ordinary Lamb. It was the Lamb of God.

Behold the Lamb of God. This Hebrew expression spoke of three grand truths.

First, the Lamb was foreordained of God. God never intended that the sacrificial lambs of the Jews should be offered forever. They were all significant by way of typology, but insufficient by way of a Divine satisfaction for sin. All the thousands of lambs slain from the hour of deliverance from Egypt could give the conscience of men no rest. All the Paschal lambs ever eaten could not satisfy the hungering spirit. Only the Lamb whom God the Father foreordained could do that.

Second, the *Lamb of God* speaks of a Lamb well pleasing to God. The Father was well pleased because the Lamb did not resist His will but always did what the Father asked. The Father was well pleased because the Lamb would give value to all previous sacrifices pledged. The Lamb would confirm that God keeps His word and honors His covenants to men. (Gen. 3:15)

Third, the Lamb of God reflects the most tender relation conceivable to God. God wanted the world to know He was coming to them, not in wrath, but in love and tenderness for a stated purpose:

To take (bear) away the sin of the world. Sin is a great burden to bear. Its tremendous weight lies heavy upon the human heart. Who can endure the crushing magnitude of sin? It will ultimately sink the guilty soul into the depth of hell.

Someone is needed to take this burden away.

Someone is needed to bear the sin of the world.

Behold that Someone! Behold the Lamb of God!

*“He paid a debt He did not owe.
I owed a debt I could not pay.
I needed Someone to wash my sins away.
And now I sing a brand new song,
"Amazing Grace," (all day long)
Christ Jesus paid a debt that I could never pay.*

~*~

Notice what the Lamb will do. He will take away sin. He will do this by shedding His blood for, *“without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin”* (Heb. 9:22). By shedding His blood the Lamb will make atonement for sin. The atonement will appease the Divine justice of God and turn away His wrath from all those who are covered by the shed blood of the Lamb.

*“He paid a debt at Calvary,
He cleansed my soul and made me free,
I'm glad that Jesus did all my sins erase;
I now can sing a brand new song, "Amazing Grace," (all day long)
Christ Jesus paid a debt that I could never pay”*

~*~

Those who are covered by the blood of the Lamb are those who by faith look to Christ as the Savior of the world. Do you understand? The Sacrifice, the Lamb of God, is a Savior. He came to bare our sins in His own body on the tree.

*“You ask me why He paid the price
Why He would make the sacrifice
Why He would walk up that hill called Calvary
He loved me more than His own life
O glorious day (He saved my life!)
My Jesus paid the debt that I could never pay.*

*One day He's coming back for me
To live with Him eternally,
Won't it be glory to see Him on that day!
I then will sing a brand new song, "Amazing Grace," (all day long)
Christ Jesus paid a debt that I could never pay."*

~*~

Oh Jesus was made a curse for us and so He is a complete Savior. He finished His work, and by one offering hath perfected forever them who are sanctified.

He is also a mighty Savior. Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, male or female, young or old can come to Him and love Him and trust Him for, "*He ever liveth to make intercession*".

This means that Jesus is a perpetual Savior. Not merely has the Lamb taken away the sin of those souls who call Him Lord but He still bears them away for the text says He, "*taketh away the sin of the world*".

Does this mean that all people shall be saved? No, but it does mean that all those in the world who shall lay hold of Christ by faith shall be saved with certainty and finality.

Is it any wonder that John began to travel with the Lamb of God and that he followed the Lamb wherever He went?

And so, John was with Jesus during His first tour of Galilee.

He was with the Lord at the wedding in Cana (John 2:1ff)

and he was present at Jerusalem during the Lord's early

Judean ministry.

John never wavered and he never went home. Wherever Jesus was, John could be found nearby.

As the Gospel narrative unfolds there are several distinct elements that emerge about John.

First, he was a personable individual. There was something about John that attracted attention and made people want to be around him. Before long John was numbered with the select inner group that was with Jesus during important moments. With Peter and James, John was present

at the raising of the daughter of Jarius (Mark 5:27),

and at the transfiguration. (Matt. 17)

During the agony of Christ in Gethsemane,

John was nearby. He was sleeping, but he was there.

Second, John was a man of great passion. There was intensity in his personality that earned him the nickname, along with his brother, *Sons of Thunder*. Unfortunately, his passion was often misguided. In Mark 3:17 John wanted to destroy a Samaritan village because the people there refused the Lord and His disciples hospitality.

On another occasion John expressed his zeal—as well as his intolerance and exclusiveness—when he informed Jesus, “*Therefore, we saw one casting out demons in thy name; and we forbade him, because he followed not us*” (Mark 9:38).

Thinking to be commended for his action John was rebuked as the Lord responded, “*Forbid him not: for there is no man, which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is on our part. For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward*” (Mark 9:39-41).

There is a third characteristic we learn about John. He was a man of high ambition. Perhaps it was because he had already tasted some of the success of this world that he went with his mother and his brother to ask a favor of the Lord. He did not ask for much. He only wanted the highest place of honor when Christ came into His kingdom (Mark 10:35). But Jesus said, “*No*”, to that request.

It is instructive to note, while on that occasion the Lord had to rebuke the passion of selfish ambition, at the Last Supper, John did occupy a privileged place of intimacy next to Jesus (John 13:23). The Lord does not deny honor to people. He simply wants His servants to wait to be exalted.

A fourth characteristic of John is that he was a man of faith. Perhaps his greatest expression of faith came when he saw the empty tomb and beheld the grave clothes. *“He saw and believed” (John 20:8).*

Never again would John even weaken as to whom Jesus Christ was and what He came to do. For the rest of his life John was a preacher of righteousness. Initially

John united with Peter for the work of proclaiming the gospel.

John was with Peter at the Gate of the Temple

when a lame man was healed (Acts 3:10).

He was also with Peter on the mission to Samaria

to speak to the new converts (Acts 8:12).

Besides being a preacher of righteousness, John was also a defender of the faith. It was not long before heresy arose in the early church. Heresy is basically truth mixed with error to a great degree. According to the Church father Jerome, John wrote the gospel in order to combat the heresy of Cerinthus.

Cerinthus was teaching the Gnostic heresy that Jesus was not God. He asserted that Christ did not exist before Mary and when Jesus was born it was only an appearance. His death was only apparent, not real.

It was said that if Jesus walked along the sandy shores of the sea His feet would leave no imprint for He was not true humanity. So it was that John wrote, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth.”*

Despite the seriousness of Gnosticism and the heresy of Cerinthus, Church history does contain a rather humorous incident as recorded by Eusebius. John, the Apostle, once entered a public bath to wash: but ascertaining Cerinthus was within, he ran out of the place and fled from the door, not enduring to remain under the same roof with him. John exhorted those within to do the same, *“Let us flee lest the bath fall in, as long as Cerinthus, that enemy of the truth, is within”*.

The image of an apostle running out of a public bathhouse dripping wet while clutching his clothes is not the most dignified of images, but it does serve to illustrate John’s passion for purity of doctrine and his willingness to personally avoid heretics.

Tradition records something else about John. Not only did he defend his faith but he was willing to suffer for it as well. Legend says that John first faced martyrdom when he was boiled in a huge basin of bubbling oil during a surge of official persecution in Rome. In a miraculously way he survived the ordeal.

Later, to the Isle of Patmos John was banished as a political activist. While on Patmos, John looked out towards the main land and longed to be with his church family again. Perhaps the apostle was thinking about that when he wrote in the *Book of the Revelation* that in the redeemed earth, “*There was no more sea*” by which he meant there will be no more separations from those we love in the Lord. After being freed he returned to serve as Bishop of Edessa in modern Turkey.

On the 26th day of September c. AD 100 John died peacefully. Before his death his disciples had gathered around him. As was his custom John told them again, “*Little children, love one another*”.

After a while his disciples grew weary of this single command repeated over and over. “*Master*”, one of them asked. “*Why do you always say this?*”

And John replied, “*It is the Lord’s command. And if this alone be done, it is enough!*”

With that, the man of passion, the man of ambition, the man of faith, the preacher of righteousness, and the apostle of love died.

From the life of John come several lessons.

First, a particular type of personality does not prohibit a person from entering into the kingdom of heaven or being used of God. While the Lord might have to transform our temperament, there is always hope that God can use any type of disposition in His service.

Second, a teachable spirit is characteristic of true discipleship. Part of being teachable is a willingness to receive instruction—even if it takes the form of a rebuke. On several occasions Jesus had to rebuke John who was humbled under the rod of corrective discipline. It is not easy to learn when under the rod but if God grants grace, there will be much value.

Third, humility is of great virtue. Despite the fact that we have more of John's writing than any other apostle, there is very little autobiographical material. Sometimes he is called, "*The disciples whom Jesus loved*" but beyond that it is Christ, not John, who is set forth.

Fourth, the life of John teaches Christians that love must be a guiding passion. To be loving and to love is the highest virtue of Christendom. To love God and one's fellowman is the summary of the Law. If we do that, it really is enough.

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I. Meeting the Master

II. Every Word is Important

- *Behold*
- *The Lamb*
 - ❖ The Lamb was foreordained of God
 - ❖ The Lamb of God speaks of a Lamb well pleasing to God
 - ❖ The Lamb of God reflects the most tender relationship
- *Which taketh away the sin of the world*

III. Jesus

- Jesus is a complete Savior
- Jesus is a mighty Savior
- Jesus is a perpetual Savior

IV. Characteristics of a Former Fisherman

- John was a personable personality
- John was a passionate personality
- John was a pursuing personality
- John was a prayerful personality
- John was a protective personality

V. Spiritual Lessons

- A particular personality does not prohibit a person from being used of God
- A teachable spirit is characteristic of conversion
- Humility is a great virtue
- Love must be the guiding passion in the heart of the Christian