

The Twelve Apostles

Lesson 4

John

"The Apostle Who Personified Love"

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Text: John 1:35-39.

Introduction: John is the younger son of Zebedee and brother of James. He is part of the inner circle of Jesus' ministry and usually always mentioned with one of the other Apostles when named. He is familiar to us because he wrote so much of the New Testament. He gave us the Gospel account three Epistles and the Book of the Revelation. Aside from Luke and the Apostle Paul, John wrote more of the New Testament than any other human author.

John has often been nicknamed "the apostle of love" he wrote more than any other New Testament author about the importance of love, laying particular stress on the Christian's love for Christ, Christ's love for his church, and the love for one another that is supposed to be the hallmark of true believers.

When you study Matthew, Mark, and Luke you'll notice that John is nearly always named along with someone else, with Jesus, with Peter, or with James. Only one time does John appear and speak alone.

We find him in Mark 9:38-40.

Mark 9:38-40 And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbad him, because he followeth not us. 39 But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. 40 For he that is not against us is on our part.

We must remember in his younger years he is referred to as "a son of thunder" he was passionate, zealous, and personally ambitious, just like his brother James. When we compare the young disciple with the aged patriarch, you see that as he matured, his areas of greatest weakness all developed into his greatest strengths.

John had a passion for truth and it shaped the way he wrote. Of all the writers of the New Testament, he was the most black and white in his thinking. He thinks and writes in absolutes. For example, in his Gospel, he sets light against darkness, life against death, the kingdom of God against the kingdom of the devil, the children of God against the children of Satan, the judgment of the righteous against the judgment of the wicked, the resurrection of life against the resurrection of damnation, receiving Christ against rejecting Christ, fruit against fruitlessness, obedience against disobedience, love against hatred.

Three years with Jesus moved the Son of Thunder toward becoming an apostle of love.

When we first encounter John, both he and Andrew are disciples of John the Baptist.

John's love of truth is evident in all his writings, he uses the Greek word for truth twenty-five times in his Gospel and twenty more times in his epistles.

John is the only one of the four evangelists who does not give a list of the twelve apostles, of which he was one.

As for John's mother, Salome, she was a disciple of Jesus, and her following Him suggests that after the boys left home, Zebedee died, and that the business was sold, allowing Salome to be one of the women who ministered unto Jesus of her substance.

I. A Disciple of John the Baptist.

He is believed to be the unnamed disciple with Andrew who were followers of John the Baptist until the day that John pointed out Jesus as the Lamb of God.

John 1:35-37. Again, the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; 36 And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! 37 And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.

The memory of seeing Jesus as the Lamb never left him. Such a truth became more vivid as he saw the Lamb led to slaughter, and crucified on a cross. "The Lamb, the bleeding Lamb," was to become the keynote of the gospel, epistles, and Apocalypse which he was to write. More than twenty times in the last book of the Bible John refers to the Lamb, and exalts Him as the central theme of the Everlasting Song before the Throne.

II. A Confidant of Christ.

John 13:21-25. When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.22 Then the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake.23 Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved.24 Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake.25 He then lying on Jesus' breast saith unto him, Lord, who is it?

The disciple whom Jesus loved, what an honor the bear such a title, Peter and James are mentioned first for their leadership, but John would seem to have a chief place in the heart of Christ. In the text when Peter beckoned to John to ask the Lord who should betray, I have always believed that John had no question that it certainly would not be him.

John 19:26-27. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son!27 Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.

We can only wonder why Jesus chose John to care for his mother on the cross when Mary had other children besides Jesus. It may have been that many in His own family had not believed on Him and He knew John had no doubt who He was and what He had come to do.

III. A Herald of Love.

More than eighty times, John uses the term love in his writings, and to him the love of which Christ spake was not a sentiment, but a principle, a life transforming virtue.

John's theology is best described as a theology of love. He taught that God is a God of love, that God loved His own Son, that God loved the world, that God is loved by Christ, that Christ loved His disciples,

that Christ's disciples loved Him, that all men should love Christ, that we should love one another, and that love fulfills the law.

Jerome says in his commentary on Galatians that the aged apostle John was so frail in his final days at Ephesus that he had to be carried into the church. One phrase was constantly on his lips: "My little children, love one another." Asked why he always said this, he replied, "It is the Lord's command, and if this alone be done, it is enough."

IV. A Witness of Integrity.

John would use the word "witness" some seventy times, however there were other forms of the word, such as record, testify, and testimony. All are akin to the Greek word for *martyr*.

John sets forth no fewer than seven forms of reliable evidence¹. The witness of John the Baptist, forerunner of Jesus (*John 5:32, 33*). **32 There is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true 33 Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth.**

2. The witness of Scripture (*John 5:39*). **39 Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.**

3. The witness of the Father (*John 5:37*). **37 And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape.**

4. The witness of Christ Himself (*John 8:14*). **14 Jesus answered and said unto them, Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true: for I know whence I came, and whither I go; but ye cannot tell whence I come, and whither I go.**

5. The witness of Christ's miracles (*John 5:36*). **36 But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.**

6. The witness of the Holy Spirit (*John 15:26*). **26 But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:**

7. The witness of the disciples (*John 15:27*). **27 And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.**

John was the first to see the fact of the resurrection, and as an accurate witness he described all he saw, even the position of the clothing left behind. Then, he was the first to discern his Lord's person on the lakeside when He appeared to the disciples after their fruitless toil, and, again, as a witness he described an that happened.

Before John could bear witness to the world of the great truths God had chosen him to reveal, it was necessary for him to see in all His divine glory the Master whom he long loved and served (Rev. 1: 10-20). What he saw and heard he wrote in a book, the contents of which can be summarized thus: (1) A vision of the Lord Jesus Christ in all His majesty. (2) A vision of His church in all its reality. (3) A vision of a lost world in all its hostility. (4) A vision of eternity in all its glory.

V. A Writer of Repute.

As to John's style and diction as a writer, Dr. W. Graham Scroggie reminds us that, "None of the Evangelists has so limited a vocabulary as the Apostle John, but none of them makes better use of what he has."

While in the early days of the church the apostles we accused of being ignorant and unlearned men they each used their abilities to magnify the Son of God. John is no exception he would give us the glorious Revelation of Jesus Christ.

Being characteristically modest John does not attach his name to this fourth book of the New Testament, the Gospel according to John, which is pre-eminently the "gospel of conversations," since it relates more largely than the other gospels the individualism of Jesus as expressed in His interviews. Altogether there are twenty-four conversations held with seventeen people.

His first epistle:

In what other book of the Bible does the exalted view of the love of God shine forth as brightly as in this first epistle of John? The first error disturbing the early church was the denial of the human, and not of the divine nature of Christ. To establish believers in sound views respecting the person and office of Christ, His human and divine nature, and His atonement was the burden of this epistle.

His second epistle:

2John 1:1 The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth;

We don't know if John was writing to a Christian mother or to the church; but one thing is for certain it can be applied as a message to the church to beware and avoid false teachers.

His third epistle"

This short letter was addressed to the charitable and hospitable Gaius, so kind a friend to John, and so courteous an entertainer of all needy believers.

I see Gaius as the exhorter, Diotrephes as the egoist, and Demetrius as the example.

The Apocalypse:

There can be no doubt about John's authorship of this final book of the Bible. Withholding his name from his gospel and epistles, he uses it five times over in the Revelation.

Conclusion:

Perhaps the sum of John's teaching for your heart and mine is that heaven is to be in the presence of Christ, for the Christian who has become like Him can, therefore, see Him as He is. Further, John's life illustrates that the image of Jesus is most clearly seen and reflected by those who respond most to His love.

1John 3:1 Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore, the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

1John 3:2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.