

THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF BELIEVING GOD'S LOVE TO US

INTRODUCTION:

Two weeks ago, we noted that the Apostle John referred to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” Why did he call himself that? It was not because Jesus took John aside and told him he was Jesus’ favorite. Jesus would never do something like that. I believe it was because John really got ahold of the fact that God is love—and that God loved **him**. Please turn again to I John, chapter 4.

--Notice vs 16 “And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love...” John let thoughts of God’s love captivate his heart and mind. He didn’t just know about it *intellectually*—he **experienced** it to the point that he personalized it. ‘I am loved by Jesus Christ’ was how he thought of himself.

--In verse 17 we see result #1 of knowing and believing God’s love to us: “boldness in the day of judgment.” Why can we be bold? Because as Jesus is—now—so are we—now. God counts as *in Christ* and because Jesus was already judged for our sin, we can’t be and won’t be if we have asked Him to save us.

--In verse 18 we see result #2 of knowing and believing God’s love to us: “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear.” It is not **us** loving God “perfectly” that casts out fear; rather, it is our **comprehension** of God’s love to us that casts out fear. We have a reverential fear of God—an awe of Him—but we are not terrified of Him because His love has provided a payment for our sin—thus forgiveness and acceptance.

John “got it,” didn’t he? He understood and believed the love that God had to him—and it changed His life. This morning I want us to dig into the life of John and see what he was like *before* he knew and believed God’s love versus what he was like *afterward*. As we look at John’s life, I want us to ask ourselves this question: Do I believe God can change me the way He changed John?

1. Prominence of John as the last living apostle

--John was probably the youngest apostle—and most certainly the one who lived the longest. Scholars and historians believe he was about 98 years old when he died.

--Historians and scholars also believe Jesus died around 30 A.D.—meaning John lived almost 70 years after the death of Christ!

--John was the author of the gospel of John, I-III John, and Revelation. John’s writings were the last 5 books written in the NT. When you consider the gospel of John, more time elapsed between the actual events of Jesus’ life and when John wrote the book (between 70 and 90 AD) than was true of any of the other gospel writers. The flip side, however, is that John wrote the book of Revelation in 95 or 96 A.D. meaning there was very little time between him receiving the vision and words from Christ and when he wrote them down. Revelation is obviously then the most recently written book and John was the last divine author.

--Keeping in mind the lateness of John’s writings helps us better understand why he would write things like...**I John 2:7** “Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning.”

I John 3:11 “For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.” In essence, John was saying ‘These are not new commandments—Jesus taught them 60 plus years ago!’

--As we read the writings of John, another thing that is important to keep in mind that this is an old man who has **seen a lot** in his life time.

--He was with Jesus—and the other 11 disciples—24/7 for 3 plus years

--He saw the miracles Jesus performed while on earth, but he also saw Jesus crucified

--He was assigned the task of caring for Mary, Jesus’ mother

--He saw the “popularity” of Christianity “rise”—thousands of people saved at Pentecost,

--But also saw persecution rise and his own brother James was martyred in AD 44

--In A.D. 70, he saw the words of Jesus fulfilled that “there shall not be left one stone upon another...” The Jewish historian Josephus claims that over 1 million people died that year—mostly Jews—because of fires and starvation as the Romans obliterated Jerusalem and the temple.

--And in approximately A.D. 95, he himself was exiled to the isle of Patmos because of his faith

How famous was John? Think of the prominence he would have had being the last person living who had walked and talked with Jesus Himself. In fact, many scholars believe John was so well known that that is why he didn't feel the need to identify himself as the writer of John...or I John or II John or III John!

John wasn't always a godly, humble man, however. He *ended* that way—that was the transformation that had taken place in his life—but he didn't *start out* that way.

Let's consider next the **2. The Personality of John—Son of Thunder!**

Mark 3:17 “And James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; and he surnamed them Bo-a-ner-geez, which is, The **sons of thunder**.”

Who called James and John “sons of thunder”? Jesus did!

Why? Were they preachers with loud, booming voices?

--No; they were fisherman!

--In fact, it is noteworthy that although we have recorded in the Bible sermons that Stephen preached and that Peter preached and that Paul preached, we don't have one sermon from the mouth of John!

--Why did Jesus call them sons of thunder? We aren't exactly told, but I believe it was in part due to their “fiery” personalities. We have a couple examples of that; the first we will look at is in Mark 9:38-40.

A. Rebuking of non-followers (Mark 9:38-40)

John “forbad” him—John told him to stop—because “he followeth not us.”

What did that look like? ‘Hey, you over there—what do you think you are doing? You aren't a follower of Jesus so stop doing good things in His name!’ Isn't it interesting that John did admit that the man was “casting out devils [demons] in thy [Jesus'] name?”

On the one hand we can think, ‘Good job, John—in order to serve Jesus, you should be following Him!’ That's not what Jesus did though, was it? Jesus didn't **commend** John for his attitude—He told him to change it. “Don't forbid him—if he is doing miracles in my name and God is blessing him, he is not against us—he's on our side!”

Can we be like John in this regard? We can get tunnel vision sometimes, can't we? We can fall into the trap of believing that all churches should be a certain way and that if they aren't that way, they aren't following Jesus. I love the Baptist Distinctives—the things that set us apart from other churches—but I don't love them because they are Baptist—I love them because they are **Bible**! There are Bible churches that differ from us in their music standards and views on social drinking, but they are still used of God. John MacArthur is the Pastor of Grace Community Church and the word “Baptist” is obviously not in their church name. Does that mean that God isn't using him and that he is not a follower of Jesus?

We need to be careful **who** we rebuke—and **why** we rebuke them. John rebuked who he thought was a non-follower of Jesus—then Jesus rebuked him for doing so! In Luke 9:51-56 we see another instance of John's “thunderous” personality.

B. Retaliating against non-receivers (Luke 9:51-56)

--v 51 “received up” means into heaven. Jesus knew His life here on earth would soon be coming to an end

--v 52 Jesus would need a place to stay on His way to Jerusalem and sent messengers ahead to make arrangements. The Samaritans were half-breeds—they were not “pure” Jews—and they did not believe the true center of worship was at Jerusalem. In fact, they had their own temple on Mount Gerizim.

John 4:20 (Woman at the well said to Jesus): “Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.”

--v 53 “And they did not receive Him...” Imagine these messengers going into a village of Samaritans and saying, ‘Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem and needs a place to stay.’ How surprised these messengers must have been when told, ‘No—if He is going to Jerusalem, He is obviously siding with the Jews. If He were really the Messiah, He would **choose us** over the Jews and would want to stay here—not just pass through. Tell Him we don’t have room.’

Can you imagine bringing that kind of news back to Jesus and the others? James and John were outraged—how dare they treat Jesus this way! At first glance, we might be tempted to think they were model disciples.

i. Seemingly commendable request (Lk 9:54)

--Concerned for reputation—didn’t like Jesus being treated this way

--Consequences for rejection—“Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, even as Elias [Elijah] did?” They should be **destroyed** for rejecting you!

--Confident request—if the Lord gave them the okay, they were sure miraculous fire would come, too!

Is it any wonder Jesus called them “sons of thunder?” Once again, we need to ask ourselves: ‘Are we sometimes like John is this regard?’ Are we quick to get angry? Do we want to take things into our own hands and “dole out” punishment? We can be like that sometimes, can’t we? We want to shake people—or rap them upside the head—neither of which is at all Christ-like. Notice Jesus’ response.

ii. Savior’s correcting response (Lk 9:55-56)

--v 55 “But He turned, and rebuked them”—Jesus rebuked them for having the wrong spirit

--v 56 “For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.” Reminded them of the reason for His coming—to **save** men’s lives; not to **destroy** them. Physically dead people can’t repent, can they? We are told in II Peter 3:9 the reason for **God’s longsuffering**: “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” Shouldn’t surprise us that Jesus lived that out!

Lessons for us

--There will be those who reject Jesus and as much as we wonder “how” or “why” they could do such a thing, being angry with them is not the proper response

--Jesus warned us that we would face rejection, too!

Jesus said in **John 15:18** “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.”

I find it interesting that John repeated that very thing:

I John 3:13 “Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.”

--Jesus showed us that there is a right way—and a wrong way—to respond to rejection. Jesus remained loving in spite of being rejected—we need to strive to do that as well.

John had a fiery personality. He was zealous for Jesus—but he wasn’t always forgiving or patient. God changed him though, didn’t He? Can God change you and I? He most certainly can!

John’s intolerance of those who didn’t follow Jesus and of those who wouldn’t receive Jesus was not the only thing that needed changing in his life, however.

3. *The Pride of John—wanting a Place of Honor!* (Mark 10:35-37)

A. Pride seen in their request of Jesus (Mk 10:37)

What was their request? That each would sit on one side or the other of Jesus “in thy glory.” In Matthew 20:21 it reads, “in thy kingdom.” Jesus would be King in His kingdom—they wanted to be seated on His right and left side in a place of prominence.

What is probably even more amazing about this request is the fact that Jesus had already promised them a rather important position.

Matthew 19:28 “And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the **throne** of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve **thrones**, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

Jesus had already told them they would each have their **own throne**—and they would each **judge a tribe**—and yet that did not seem to be enough. Did this desire for prestige cause problems? It sure did! Notice verse 41: “And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John.”

B. Pride seen in the timing regarding Jesus (Mk 10:32-35)

Pride is not only seen in **what** they requested—it is also seen in the timing of their request. Turn back a page or two to Mark 9, verse 33. (Read Mk 9:33-35).

--They had a dispute regarding who would be the greatest (v 34)

--Jesus taught them regarding greatness and that the greatest will be the servant of all (v 35)

My point is this—they had **already had a lesson** from Jesus regarding position and pride, yet not long afterwards we have James and John asking Jesus for this special “favor.”

--Back to Mark 10. Here’s another interesting thing about the timing of their request. Notice Mark 10:32-34. How much time elapsed between Jesus’ instruction regarding His upcoming death referred to in verse 34 and the request of James and John in verse 35? Not told so we can’t say for sure.

--Consider this: if there wasn’t a lot of time in between, He just finishes telling them of the horrible treatment He is going to face in Jerusalem, but all they are worried about is where they are going to sit after He is risen from the dead!

--Where is the sympathy toward Jesus? Where is the outrage over an innocent man being mocked and whipped to a pulp and spit upon and killed? There isn’t any because they are too busy seeking greatness for themselves!

Jeremiah 45:5 “And seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not...”

C. Pride seen in their response to Jesus (Mk 10:38-39)

We see John’s pride in **what** he requested and **when** he requested it; we also see it in the response he gives to Jesus when Jesus warns him of the upcoming difficulties and trials he would face. Notice verse 38. Jesus isn’t talking about drinking from a cup or being baptized—immersed—in water. He is talking about drinking from the cup of **affliction** and experiencing extreme **suffering**.

Their response? Verse 39: “We can.” Short answer, but in essence they were saying, ‘we are equal to the task, we can handle whatever comes our way.’ Peter was not the only one who bragged he would follow Jesus to the end—even if it meant death. And Peter also wasn’t the only one who **betrayed** Jesus. Mark 14:50 says, “And they all forsook Him, and fled”—indicating John fled as well.

Were James and John the only ones who battle pride? Not hardly; we all battle pride. And sometimes I think too often times we underestimate the devastating effect pride can have in our life.

--Pride wrecks **marriages**. I remember a friend who had just retired from the military. His wife was a school teacher and their two adult children were out of the house. They had a nice home and he had some hunting land up north. He got this somewhat crazy idea that they should sell everything and buy a resort. I'm not really sure how serious he was about going through with that plan, but his wife was dead-set against it. The more she resisted the idea, the more determined he was to go through with it. So, after 25 years of marriage—and what should have been a new chapter in their life together—they divorced. He moved up north and lived on his land, but did not buy the resort. And he died—alone. I'm of the belief that if either one of them would have humbled themselves, their marriage could have easily been saved. But neither did.

--Pride wrecks **churches**. One person in the church—or a group of people—wants something a certain way. Often times it has nothing to do with doctrine. Instead it is over something trivial like the color of carpet, paint, or siding. Or maybe they want what they consider a place of importance in the church and go about gathering a following. What happens after that? They cause division in the church to the point that the church splits.

John as a young man was proud and wanted a place of importance—seated right next to Jesus! He was also impatient and intolerant and wanted to take things into his own hands. “Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” He was indeed a “son of thunder!”

--But he heard the teachings of love from Jesus

--and saw the demonstration of the sacrificial love of Jesus

--and focused on serving a risen Jesus who loved him.

In other words, John knew and believed and experienced the love that God had to him with the result that it **changed** him. It changed him from a “son of thunder” as a young man to “the Apostle of love” as an old man. God did that for John—and God can do that for you!

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

1. There is a pride that is worse than the pride that wrecks marriages and the pride that wrecks churches. What pride is that? It is the pride that **damns souls**. Why do people end up in hell? They are too proud to admit they are a sinner and cannot save themselves. Or they are too proud to consider that their opinions are wrong and the Bible is right! **Psalm 10:4** “The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.”

2. For those of you who are are saved, is God speaking to you about changes that need to be made? Are you proud? Are you impatient? Are you vengeful? It is not just a matter of **not** doing those things—it is also a matter of latching onto and meditating upon God's love for you and being transformed by Him.