

JOHN

Thus far we have been reacquainting ourselves with three of the twelve disciples, namely Peter, his brother Andrew, and fellow-fisherman James. We now move on to consider John, the brother of James.

The background to the call is recorded in Lk. 6:12, 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 [out] of them he chose twelve [*καὶ ἐκλεξάμενος ἀπ' αὐτῶν δώδεκα*], whom also he named apostles; ¹⁴ Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, ¹⁵ Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called Zelotes, ¹⁶ And Judas the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor.

Now, obviously as we have been noting, these are real *people* with a unique calling. In chapter nine they will be granted the ability to cast out demons and to perform miracles. Also, in Mt. 19:28 Jesus promised them, *ye which have followed me, in the regeneration* [*παλιγγενεσία, renewal, restoration*] 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.* And when we get to Heaven we shall see the names of the twelve disciples in the twelve foundations of the city wall (Rev. 21:14). ... And yet, these were just ordinary men, - *treasure in earthen vessels* (II Cor. 4:7), - who God used to establish His Kingdom.

John is one of the most prominent New Testament writers, - he wrote the Gospel of John, the three epistles, and the Book of the Revelation. He was also part of the disciples' 'inner circle', along with Peter, James and Andrew. In fact, next to Peter we are given the most information about John. He was the brother of James, of course (Mt. 4:21), and together they were in the fishing business with Simon Peter and Andrew.

His name in Hebrew is *Yohanan* and in Greek it is *Ioannes* and it means "Jehovah is a gracious Giver". It was the fifth most popular male name in Judea during those times. Altogether there are four 'John's' mentioned in the New Testament, - John the Baptist, John Mark, John who belonged to the family of the chief priest (Acts 4:6), and John the disciple/apostle.

John the disciple would have had an ordinary education and yet his writings contain deep and profound teachings. There are certain words he uses with

particular meaning and emphasis. Two such words are ‘truth’ (ἀλήθεια) and ‘love’ (ἀγάπη) ... for example,

- **Jn. 1:14** 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 ... **17** For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ ... **3:21** But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.
- **Jn. 13:34** A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. **35** By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another ... **14:15** If ye love me, keep my commandments ... **14:21** He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

Indeed, when Paul was setting out the priorities **Eph. 4:12** for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ he emphasised the unity in these same two characteristics, **Eph. 4:15** speaking the truth in love ... And that is what John did in his writings. He had the two in balance. Some people have more of the truth but they are somewhat lacking in the love of the Lord Jesus which ought to accompany it. On the other hand, there are those who accentuate the love of Christ at the expense of maintaining the truth of His word, - they compromise on fundamental Biblical doctrines in order to seek unity. ... The two must be kept in balance though, and that is the framework which defines the writings of John.

However, John wasn't always so balanced! He and his brother were nicknamed “the sons of thunder” because of what they wanted to do with the Samaritan village who rejected the Gospel (Lk. 9:54). Also, he and his brother were so ambitious they wanted to ‘lord it over’ their fellow-disciples, - they wanted to sit next to Jesus when He would come to set up His kingdom on earth (Mt. 20:20-21).

... In other words, the Lord had to work on John! He wasn't naturally humble. He didn't find it easy to love or to like everyone the same. When we look at him closely we see his volatility, his brashness, and his formidable aggressiveness. At the same time, though, he was passionate for the Lord ... and zealous for Him. ... Jesus could see beyond the raw and unrefined John, and Jesus knew what he would become!

By the way ... in the ‘Synoptic Gospels’ (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) there is only one occasion when John speaks out for himself, - every other time he is included along with Peter and James. We find the occasion in Mark chapter nine where the Gospel writer recounts the words of Jesus to the twelve disciples, **Mk. 9:1** Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power. ... What a tremendous statement! ... Jesus was prophesying that *some* of those twelve disciples, - in their lifetime, - would experience a foretaste of His Heavenly majesty and glory.

Was that Jesus covertly declaring the establishment of some kind of symbolic millennium? No, for if He was announcing the start of a symbolic/spiritual/non-literal millennium surely *all* the disciples would be participating in it ... and not just the ‘some’!

Was Jesus here making an announcement about a literal one thousand years away ahead in the future? Once again, *no*, for all the disciples, - with the exception of Judas Iscariot, - ... not just ‘some’ ... would enjoy *that* when it came.

So then, what *was* Jesus talking about? He was referring to glimpses of His coming glory such as John and the writer to the Hebrews described, **Heb. 1:1** God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, **2** Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; **3** Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power ... **Jn. 1:14** we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.

And that is what happened for in the next verse, - Mk. 9:2, - we read, And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into a high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them, - *that* is the immediate fulfilment of the promise in v.1, there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power. ... They, - the ‘some’, - will experience a taste of what Paul also wrote about to the Thessalonian believers, **I Thess. 4:16** the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God ... **Mt. 25:31** When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory ... And Peter, James, and John, - as Jesus foretold, - would not die until they had literally seen a foretaste of the kingdom of God coming with power ... and that is what they experienced

when they saw the glorified Saviour transfigured before them, ³ And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow.

That is the same as Daniel saw in his vision, **Dan. 7:9** the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow ... And it was the same as John would be privileged to see many years later on the island of Patmos, **Rev. 1:13** And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man ... ¹⁴ His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow ... That's what Peter, James and John saw on the Mount of Transfiguration ... and it initially frightened them (⁶ they were sore afraid)!

And afterwards, on their way back down the mountain Jesus commanded them *not* to tell anyone what had taken place until after His resurrection (v.9). ... *What a secret to keep!* ... Jesus had it all planned! ... Of course, the disciples had difficulty understanding what Jesus meant by the resurrection (v.10).

So, they had lots to talk about (v.11-13), and then some scribes also joined in with their questions ... during which the Lord delivered a young man out from under the control of an evil spirit.

Throughout this time Peter, James and John's experience on the Mount of Transfiguration was very much on their minds and prior to meeting up with the other disciples (note v.35, *And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them ...*), Jesus spoke specifically to the three disciples who had been with Him when He was transfigured, and He asked them a question He knew the answer to but He asked them just to hear what they would say, **Mk. 9:33** *What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?* ³⁴ *But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest. ...*

They had analysed the situation and come up with the conclusion this was a precursor to *them* receiving glory! So Jesus got all the twelve disciples together, ³⁵ *And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.* ³⁶ *And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them,* ³⁷ *Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.*

At that point, ³⁸ *John [whose words are nowhere else recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke] 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. Now, remember, this is the only time in the Synoptic Gospels where John, - on his*

own, - speaks ... so his words must have a real significance. Actually, John was exhibiting a very sectarian and a very narrow attitude in the words he used ... Basically he was saying, if you are outside of 'our' group, we don't want to accept you! ... That was his attitude, and the attitude of the other disciples too! ... If you don't walk like us ... If you don't talk like us ... If you don't behave like us ... If you don't think the way we think ... then we *forbid* you!

The Greek word for 'forbid' (κωλύω) means to withhold something from someone, and to have nothing to do with them ... and in this case it is referring to someone who was casting out demons in the Name of Christ ... This someone was successfully acting with the authority of Jesus over the demonic ... and John confessed, Lord, that's what we said and did to him!

... However, John's conscience was obviously bothering him because it comes across in the words he said. The man who was casting out the demons wasn't making a show of himself, or doing it for money ... but the man was clearly and powerfully giving Christ all the glory as he was casting out the demons. ... And John realised he had overstepped his authority for Jesus confirmed what John was beginning to gradually understand, 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.*

That is the kind of man John was, - if he didn't know you, you would have had a hard job being accepted by him. You might say all the right words and do all the right actions ... but you would not have been automatically or easily received by John!

That is something of which we also need to be careful! Someone comes along and they baptize infants ... and we won't have anything to do with them. That's not right, if they are genuinely saved. Someone comes along and they talk about the gifts of the Spirit ... and we won't have anything to do with them. That's not right either, if they are genuinely our brothers and sisters in the Lord. Someone comes along and they hold to a different eschatology ... and we won't have anything to do with them. The attitude is not right, if they are genuinely saved.

As you know, I am a convinced Baptist, - I cannot see one shred of Biblical evidence for paedobaptism; in fact I see it as a 'hang over' from Roman Catholicism after the Reformation, as indeed I would make the same accusation concerning a few other issues too ... but it doesn't mean a paedo-

Baptist who knows and loves the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour is any less of a Christian than I am for the same precious blood that saved me also saved them from their sins! ... And Jesus is here leading John away from a sectarian, exclusivist, and isolationist position that presents to other believers, I'm the only one that's right so I won't have anything to do with anybody else! ... And that is wrong!

It does not mean we should compromise on the great and fundamental truths because John most certainly did not! With the all-important issues of the faith there were no gray areas with him, - they were either darkness or light, life or death ... they either belonged to the Kingdom of God or the kingdom of the devil! He didn't mince his words, for example ... in the way he recorded Jesus' conversation with the Pharisees, **Jn. 8:38** I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father. **39** They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. **40** But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. **41** Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God. **42** Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. **43** Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word. **44** Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. **45** And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not.

He carries this same clear and unadulterated parallel into his epistles, for example, **1 Jn. 1:6** If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth ... **8** If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us ... **10** If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

It is good to know exactly where you stand so there is no confusion! Sometimes if you ask someone a question and they don't supply you with a straight answer, you're none the wiser! Well, regarding spiritual issues you are very certain about where John stood, **1 Jn. 4:1** Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. **2** Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: **3** And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God ... John *had* learned from the Saviour, **Mk. 9:39** Forbid him not [*... the man you saw casting out devils in My Name ...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.

You hear of people today bewitching and confusing multitudes by their so-called miracles ... miracles that turn out to be no miracles at all. They are 'showmen' who have no true saving knowledge. They are the false prophets God's Word warns us about in the last days. But when men and women, boys and girls are genuinely saved by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ shed for them at Calvary, then, - and John teaches us this, - ... then we are one in the same Lord Jesus Christ, **1 Jn. 4:9** In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. **10** Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. **11** Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. **12** No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

Yes, of course, there must be separation, - John is absolutely clear about it. We must not muddy the doctrinal waters in any attempt to overlook gross error in the mad rush today for so-called unity because true Holy Spirit-inspired unity is not an organisation to be *made*, but a relationship in Christ alone to be *kept* ... **Eph. 4:3** Endeavouring to *keep* the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

So that is how John the disciple was being taught. In all of his writings there was no hint of pride, self-exaltation, or self-ambition ... In fact, there are twenty-one chapters in the Gospel of John and, - in the King James Version, - there are 879 verses ... and there is not a single one of them that mentions the name of the disciple John. That is the kind of man he was ... in fact, *there* is the significance of the verse ... **Jn. 3:30** He must increase, but I must decrease.

While he doesn't mention his own name, he does humbly refer to himself in an obscure sort of a way, **Jn. 13:23** Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved ... **19:26** When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! ... **21:7** Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord.

So that is what John the apostle did, - he preached and taught the truth in a manner that demonstrated the Gospel in *truth* and *love*. ... That is how we are to do it also! ... Sometimes we might get it right, but there are other times when if the person doesn't tick all the right boxes they are not as good as us. Basically though, if the Lord has saved them then they *are* good enough for us! (... I can almost hear John shouting "Amen").

It is true though. We need each other. We must not compromise the Word of God, - we have to hold the truth in love ... for that was how the Lord fulfilled in His servant John the attributes required for the advancement of the Kingdom, and that too is our present and ongoing responsibility until the day when our Saviour comes again, as John described, 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. 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. ³ And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.