

## THE DISCIPLE WHOM JESUS LOVED

For several yeas I have been amazed, amused and in awe of this phrase unique to the Gospel of John, "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Almost all biblical scholars agree this is referring to John. Perhaps the amusing fact (if I may use so trivial a term), is that the reference is written by the hand of John himself. He is calling himself the disciple whom Jesus loves! Now we know the love of the Lord Jesus is certainly not limited to John. The Bible speaks of Christ's love to Lazarus, *"Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him!"* (John 11:36). Also we read, *"...When Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end"* (John 13:1).

There is something to be said about a man who is consumed with the knowledge that Jesus loves Him. The Scripture is replete with this truth of God's love toward us. Allow me to list a few: *"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith He loved us"* (Ephesians 2:4). *"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins"* (I John 4:10). *"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8). *"...Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love..."* (Jeremiah 31:3). *"The LORD did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people"* (Deuteronomy 7:7). *"We love him, because He first loved us"* (I John 4:19).

We see Simon Peter was most vocal about how much He loved Jesus and he ended up denying Him. John was the most vocal about how much Jesus loved him and he outlived all the other disciples, giving out the message of God's great love toward us. There is no stronger motivating knowledge we could have than to know that Jesus loves us. Dwight L. Moody was approached by a young preacher named Henry Moorhouse while he was preaching in England. He said to Moody, "One day I should like to come to America and preach for you." Moody nonchalantly agreed to do so should young Moorhouse come to America, but he did not seriously think he would come. He did come and Moody allowed him to preach. Moorhouse preached every night on one text, John 3:16, telling again and again that "God so loved the world." This one

truth changed the life and ministry of D.L. Moody. Later Moody said, "I never knew up to that time that God loved us so much. This heart of mine began to thaw out; I could not keep back the tears. I just drank it in. So did the crowded congregation. I tell you there is one thing that draws above everything else in the world and that is love." It will also change the life of any man or woman and it will revolutionize any church that will embrace this one great thought, "Jesus loves me". A.W. Tozer once said, "I can no more do justice to this awesome and wonder-filled topic than a child can grasp a star. Still, by reaching toward the star the child may call attention to it and even indicate the direction one must look to see it. And so, I stretch my heart toward the high, shining love of God so that we may be encouraged to look up and have hope."

I would like for us to look at the five places where John refers to Himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved and see if we might find some encouragement today.

### **1. Jesus loves me when I doubt.**

In John 13:18-24 Jesus is revealing His betrayal. At this time the Scripture says, *"Then the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake. Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved"* (John 13:22). Matthew says it like this: *"And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?"* (Matthew 26:21,22). We see the Bible points out that "every one of them" asked, "Lord, is it I?" Even John asked if it were he that would betray Jesus, however he found strength in the knowledge that, no matter how much he doubted, Jesus still loved him. Doubting is not the same as unbelief. Alister McGrath said, "Doubt is not unbelief. Doubt is natural within faith. It comes about because of our human weakness and frailty. We lack the confidence to trust fully in God and long for certainty in all matters of faith. But absolute certainty is hard to come by. Unbelief is the decision to live your life as if there is no God. It is a deliberate decision to reject Jesus Christ and all that He stands for. But doubt is something quite different. Doubt arises within the context of faith. It is a wistful longing to be sure of the things in which we trust."

### **2. Jesus loves me when I am dependable.**

John 19:26,27 records Jesus depending on John to take care of His mother. *"Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home"* (John 19:27). Again in John 19:26, John refers to himself as the disciple *"whom Jesus loved."*

This is a great reminder to live in such a way that God can trust us. John was doing this. It has been said that the greatest ability is dependability. Jesus knew He could count on John to take care of Mary.

### **3. Jesus loves me when I'm down.**

In John 20:1-5, Mary Magdalene came to Peter and John immediately after discovering our Lord was not in the tomb. John was down and depressed, but he identified himself at this time as the disciple *"whom Jesus loved."* The Scripture reads, *"So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulcher"* (John 20:4). John's hope was buried in that tomb. I appreciate the fact that he ran to tomb. He was ready for some answers. He may have been down, but he enthusiastically ran to the tomb. Oh that we might all run to Jesus when we are down! There is no amount of depression that a risen Lord cannot cure.

### **4. Jesus loves me when I desert.**

In John 21:1-7 we witness the risen Lord approaching His wayward disciples whom He had appointed to be fishers of men now fishing for fish. They had temporarily deserted.

Abraham Lincoln was known to be a man of mercy in the matter of clemency for deserters in the time of war. If he believed their crime was remedial, he would pardon them. Union chaplain John Eaton recalled a visit to the White House: *"One afternoon, in the midst of our conversation, we heard the discharge of musketry. The wind, blowing from the Virginia side, wafted the sound from across the river. Mr. Lincoln arose, and, stepping past his chair, looked out of the open window toward the Virginia shore. When he turned again, the tears were running down his cheeks. 'This is the day,' said he, 'when they shoot deserters. I am wondering whether I have used the pardoning power as much as I ought. I know some of our officers feel that I have used it with such much freedom as to demoralize the army and destroy the discipline.'" Later Lincoln said, "I don't believe it will make a man any better to shoot him, while if we keep him alive, we may at least get some work out of him."*

When John was caught in the boat fishing with Peter and others, he identified himself as the "disciple whom Jesus loved." Thank God even when we desert, Jesus is more than willing to have us back when we repent.

## **5. Jesus loves me when I die.**

In John 21:18-24 gives us one of the last conversations with our Lord and His disciples before He ascends back to heaven. The subject of death is discussed. Jesus gives a brief description of how Peter will die and when John is brought into the picture, Jesus asked, "...If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" (John 21:23). It is rare that the Lord would tell someone how they will die, but even then He did not tell Peter when he would die. The Bible says, "Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth" (Proverbs 27:1). "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that" (James 4:14).

During this conversation, John for the last time referred to himself as the disciple "whom Jesus loved." Although there have been different versions of the most famous children's hymn, Jesus Loves Me, the version I remember in our hymnbook had this stanza in it and it always bothered me: "Jesus loves me, He will stay close beside me all the way: If I love Him, when I die He will take me home on high." If we have accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior, by God's grace, we shall go to heaven. By the authority of the Word of God, I can promise you who are saved, Jesus loved you before you were born, He loves you now and He will most certainly love you when you die. Romans 8:38 and 39 promises us that we will never be separated from the love of our Lord! "For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's" (Romans 14:8). All of the joys life can give, and heaven too, because Jesus loves us!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.