

The Apostle John: His Three-fold Spiritual Identity (Jn. 21:20)

I. UNDERSTANDING THE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY REWARDS

- A. It is common to hear the testimony of a sincere believer who is spiritually dry, disillusioned or burned out. How does this happen? By pursuing God and ministry without a Kingdom mindset. The good news is that renewal is within reach of any believer who will change their mindset.
- B. Abraham is referred to as the father of faith (Rom. 4:16). The Lord appeared to him to show him how to truly live the ‘life of faith’. The Lord revealed Himself to Abraham as his exceeding great reward or his primary reward in life. John’s life illustrates this reality. Jesus as our primary reward speaks of the Spirit tenderizing and fascinating our heart by revealing Jesus’ beauty to us.
¹ ***The word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward." (Gen. 15:1)***
- C. God promised Abraham wealth, honor and a historic impact on the earth (Gen. 12:1-3; 17:2).
² ***I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great... (Gen. 12:2)***
- D. There are two major categories of God’s blessing or reward in our life. Our primary reward is Jesus Himself. Our secondary rewards include God’s favor on relationships and circumstances (health, wealth) along with authority to influence or make impact on others.
- E. Our secondary rewards must not hinder our primary reward. Often when external blessings increase, people get preoccupied with them and so their relationship with God diminishes.
² ***I pray that you prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers. (3 Jn. 2)***
- F. Disappointment often results when our secondary rewards are delayed or when they increase and decrease in different seasons. Jesus referred to this as “pruning” our life (Jn. 15:2). When Jesus is our primary reward, we do not get burned out or disillusioned when our secondary reward is delayed or diminished because our heart can be renewed daily in encountering Jesus.

II. THE APOSTLE JOHN’S TESTIMONY: BECOMING A SON OF THUNDER IN THE SPIRIT

- A. The life of John provides us with a picture of what Abraham’s Kingdom mindset looks like. As a young man John had a wrong mindset but over time he changed it and was dramatically changed. When John was about 20 years old, Jesus prophetically named him a “son of Thunder”. This prophecy marked his spirit and caused him to be alert to a new work of the Spirit in his life. This described how John would one day carry his heart before God and function in ministry.
¹⁷ ***James...and John...to whom He gave the name... "Sons of Thunder"... (Mk. 3:17)***
- B. The ‘thunder of John’s heart’ was expressed in his fleshly personality. Our heart thunders with ambition, lust, rejection, anger, bitterness, fear, or covetousness. The “thunder of God’s heart” expressed how He loved John. The young brash apostle of pride became an apostle of love.

- C. When John was about 90 years old, he wrote his Gospel. In Jn. 21:20, he wrote his “signature” for his life work. In this verse, he interpreted what it meant to him to live as a “son of Thunder”.
- ²⁰ ***Peter...saw the disciple whom Jesus loved (John) following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?" (Jn. 21:20)***
- D. John wanted to be known by how he related to Jesus not by what he accomplished before men. His identity was based on his relationship with Jesus not his ministry for Jesus. In this verse, we see how John carried his heart before God. This gives us much insight into how he lived, what he did and why he did it. This passage defines what it means for Jesus to be our primary reward and to live as a son of Thunder. Our primary reward is to know and feel His love for us, to position ourselves to love Him and receive from His heart and receive insight into the secrets of His heart.
- E. John had one of the greatest “resumes” in history being in relationship with Mary (Jn. 19:26-27) and the original apostles including Paul. John was instrumental in great revivals such as the ones in Jerusalem (Acts 1-6) and Samaria (Acts 8). John wrote five books of the NT, was promised to rule on a throne in Israel (Mt. 19:28) and saw his name on one of the foundations in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:14). Yet, John never mentions his own name in the gospel he wrote but refers to himself five times as "the disciple whom the Lord loved" (Jn. 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20).

III. JOHN SAW HIMSELF AS ONE WHOM JESUS LOVED

²⁰ ***Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple (John) whom Jesus loved following... (Jn. 21:20a)***

- A. The foundational truth that equips us to enjoy God as our primary reward is to know and feel His affection for us. God loves us in the way that God loves God. The Father feels the same intensity of love for us as He feels for Jesus. What does the Father feel when He looks at Jesus? The Father has delighted in Jesus from eternity past. There is a volcanic desire in His heart for Jesus. Jesus feels the same intensity of love for us. This great truth will transform our emotions.

⁹ ***As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.** (Jn. 15:9)*

²³ ***That the world may know that You have...loved them as You have loved Me, 24 Father, I desire that they...may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory...** (Jn. 17:23-24)*

- B. This truth gives us the right to stand before God with confidence as one of “His favorites”. Our great reward is to walk in the anointing to understand and feel God’s love. Our confession is, “Father, You love me like You love Jesus”. This makes our life great and meaningful. The Thunder of God's heart touched John's spirit. John took a hold of this truth (Jn. 15:9; 17:23) as foundational to his identity. Even 70 years later, he was still saying, “I am the disciple that God loves (instead of a great revivalist). John included this truth as part of his signature verse. God has holy and intense emotions for us. Do you know the way you move God’s heart?
- C. We are His greatest prize and the apple of His eye (Ps. 17:7-8). When we know the King loves us, we are unmoved even when others overlook or mistreat us.

- D. These statements of love were made by Jesus to the disciples just before they denied Him. In our weakness, He delights in us. We confess, “Your delight is in me”. We stop negotiating with Him and receive His testimony about us. He knew what He was getting into as He chose us.

³¹ **All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night...** (Mt. 26:31)

IV. JOHN LEANED ON JESUS’ HEART: HE WAS AN EXTRAVAGANT LOVER OF GOD

²⁰ **The disciple...who also had leaned on His breast at the supper...** (Jn. 21:20b)

- A. John leaned on Jesus’ heart expressing his love and desire to be near God. He found his satisfaction and exhilaration in being a wholehearted lover of Jesus. We are only satisfied in satisfying God. John was saying, “I am one who leans on Jesus’ heart because I love Him”. John had a masculine personality yet, was not ashamed to be known as one who lived to love Jesus.
- B. John is seen leaning on Jesus’ heart, soon after Jesus rebuked him three times for his wrong spirit (Lk. 9:46-56; Jn. 13:23). John had boldness in Jesus’ love without shame because of seeing the tenderness and passion of Jesus’ heart. It is arrogance to not be bold because we think our sin is bigger than God’s love and God’s choice. God set this whole thing up for us. We cannot take His love at that level because it crushes our pride. It takes great humility to be bold in God’s love.
- C. One aspect of the anointing of the son of Thunder is to be an extravagant lover of God. The Holy Spirit is restoring the First Commandment to first place in the Church before Jesus returns.
- ³⁷ **You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul...** (Mt. 22:37)
- D. We must agree with John’s confession, ***“I’m loved and am a lover therefore I am successful”***. These confessions summarize our spiritual identity. We do not define our lives by our struggles. We are not despised of God and hopeless hypocrites. We must live by our spiritual identity (what we look like to God) instead of our natural identity (what we look like to others)

V. JOHN POSITIONED HIMSELF TO RECEIVE GOD’S SECRETS: MORE REVELATION

²⁰ **The disciple who...said, “Lord, who is the one who betrays You?”** (Jn. 21:20c)

- A. John positioned himself to receive the secrets of Jesus’ heart. A vital aspect of being a son of Thunder and of Jesus being our great reward is to receive the spirit of revelation (Eph. 1:17). We receive this by receiving insight into the Word and prophetic dreams and visions (Acts 2:17).
- B. How do we practically receive Jesus’ secrets? By sitting at His feet to hear His Word as Mary of Bethany did. We do this, by spending long hours in prayerful meditation on the Scripture. Mary and John chose this good part. No one can choose this for us. We choose this over and over.
- ³⁹ **Mary...sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word.** ⁴¹ **Jesus said...**, ⁴² **“One thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.”** (Lk. 10:39-42)

- C. Without apology, John declared the focus of his life to sit before God long hours as David did (Ps. 27:4). Jesus gives His secrets to those who desire them enough to sit for hours before Him. The Book of Revelation was one of the greatest secrets of Jesus' heart given to John.

¹⁴ *The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him... (Ps. 25:14)*

- D. Jesus' betrayal by Judas was a crisis to Jesus that surprised the apostles. It was not obvious to anyone that Judas was the traitor. This deeply troubled Jesus' heart in the time of His greatest crisis. At that time, all the apostles were good friends with each other and with Jesus. Without exaggerating the truth, Jesus called Judas "His friend" (Mt. 26:50; Ps. 55:12-14).

⁵⁰ *Jesus said to him, "Friend, why have you come?" (Mt. 26:50)*

VI. JOHN'S JOURNEY: FROM A WRONG SPIRIT TO A SON OF THUNDER IN THE SPIRIT

- A. John was transformed from being a "son of Thunder in the flesh" to a "son of Thunder in Spirit". In his prideful youth, John was preoccupied with having preeminence over others. On the road to Capernaum the disciples argued about who was greatest. John and James led this discussion.

³³ *He came to Capernaum...He asked, "What was it you disputed...on the road?" ³⁴ They kept silent, for...they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest. (Mk. 9:33-39)*

1. After Capernaum, on the way to Jerusalem, James and John ask about who is the greatest.

³² *They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem...He...began to tell them the things that would happen to Him...³³ "The Son of Man will be betrayed...they will condemn Him to death..." ³⁵ James and John, the sons of Zebedee...³⁷ said to Him, "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory." ³⁸ Jesus said, "...Can you drink the cup I drink...?" ³⁹ They said, "We are able"...⁴¹ The ten...began to be greatly displeased with James and John. (Mk. 10:32-41)*

2. A few weeks later, John's mother brings up the issue again about their being the greatest.

²⁰ *The mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him...asking something from Him. ²¹ He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said, "Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom." (Mt. 20:20-21)*

- B. John stopped a man from casting a demon out of a tormented person because that man was not under their authority. John could not see the value of a tormented person being delivered.

⁴⁹ *John...said, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow with us." ⁵⁰ Jesus said, "Do not forbid him..." (Lk. 9:49-50)*

- C. John wanted to call fire down on a city that did not receive him. There were racial tensions between Jews and Samaritans behind this request to burn the city that rejected their ministry.

⁵¹ *He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, ⁵² and sent messengers before His face...They entered a village of the Samaritans...⁵³ But they did not receive Him...⁵⁴ James and John...said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire from heaven...as Elijah did?" ⁵⁵ He rebuked them, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of." (Lk. 9:51-55)*

1. A few days earlier, Elijah and Moses appear to Jesus in the presence of Peter, James and John at the mount of Transfiguration. In asking Jesus for permission to call fire down on a city like Elijah did, John was subtly letting all know that he had recently seen Elijah.
³⁰ Behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah... (Lk. 9:30)
2. A few years later, John prayed to release the fire of Holy Spirit on Samaria.
¹⁴ When...Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, 15 who...prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:14-15)

D. Summary: John was a fiery thunderous man, the green beret of the apostles. This tough guy who wanted to be the greatest of the great, rebukes people for moving in power then wants the destruction of a village that does not move in power. He uses his proximity of closeness to Jesus to rebuke the anointed and destroy the unresponsive. These are three expressions of fear in his comparison to others along with a touch of godly zeal.

VII. APPLICATION: WE CAN ALSO BE TRANSFORMED TO LIVE LIKE SONS OF THUNDER

- A. The Lord will transform us from being “sons of Thunder in the flesh” to “sons of Thunder in Spirit”. This begins as we change the focus of the “primary dream” of our heart from seeking increased blessing on circumstances and ministry to going deep in our relationship with Jesus.
- B. We must see ourselves differently and change our confession before God. We are those who are loved by Jesus, who lean on His heart and who boldly press into Him to receive His secrets. Even in our weakness, we are the ones that He deeply loves rather than the ones who are disqualified. He delights in us and considers us lovely and longs to give Himself to us.
- C. We confess, “I am Your beloved, Your favorite one. Your delight is in me. You desire me. You feel about me like the Father feels about You. I belong to You, my Beloved, and You are mine”.
⁹ As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. (Jn. 15:9)
¹⁹ He delivered me because He delighted in me. (Ps. 18:19)
³ I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine. (Song 6:3)
- D. Next, we set our heart to live as extravagant lover of Jesus.
- E. Then, we commit to position ourselves to receive from His heart by feeding on His Word.
- F. We must agree with John’s confession, **“I’m loved and am a lover therefore I am successful”**. These confessions summarize our spiritual identity. We do not define our lives by our struggles. We are not despised of God and hopeless hypocrites. We must live by our spiritual identity (what we look like to God) instead of our natural identity (what we look like to others)