

EXPOSITION OF JOHN (Introduction Part II)

Message #2

Various Texts

When Donald Rumsfeld spoke at the funeral for President Ford in Grand Rapids, he opened his remarks by saying - "There is a saying in Washington D.C. that when any person looks into a mirror, they see a next president." He went on to say, Gerald Ford was totally different - he never aspired to be president and was shocked that he ever became president.

That is the way it was for the Apostle John. **I am convinced that when John was a young man, he never dreamed he would end up being the last living Apostle and the greatest man on the face of the earth.** Ivor Powell said, "Had someone suggested to this youthful fisherman that he was destined to become one of the world's most famous authors, the son of Zebedee would probably have roared with laughter" (Ivor Powell, *John's Wonderful Gospel*, p. 11). He never aggressively aspired to become the Apostle "whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20) but that is what happened to him. He never planned to write the last book of the Bible - but he did, in fact, write the last book of the Bible. He never planned to be the only Apostle who would write inspired truth after A.D. 70. He never planned to become the veteran apostolic/teacher for the Church Age - but that is exactly what did happen to him.

According to the writings of Eusebius, the famed father of church history (A.D. 263-339), after John got off the island of Patmos, having written Revelation, he went back to Ephesus and eventually wrote the Gospel of John (*The History of the Church*, pp. 128-134). According to Papias (A.D. 60-130), pastor of Hierapolis in Phrygia, who was a close personal friend of John and contemporary of Polycarp - the disciple of the Apostle John, **John got off the island of Patmos, went back to Ephesus and wrote First, Second and Third John and his last book was the Gospel of John** (*The Apostolic Fathers*, pp. 307-324). The famed Biblical scholar of the 1800s, William Van Doren, cites an old historical document which says John moved to Ephesus and lived there 9 years before he was sentenced to the island of Patmos for 15 years, and, after he got off the island, he went back to Ephesus and lived 26 more years (W. H. Van Doren, *Gospel of John*, p. xvii). It was while in those final years of life in Ephesus that he wrote his final gospel.

Since history seems to establish that the Gospel of John was the last book written, and since the Apostle John was the last apostle to live and write, we think it fitting to find out what kind of man eventually became the disciple "whom Jesus loved" and the disciple whom Jesus allowed to live the longest and be used to script the finale of the Bible. The one introductory question we address here is "Who was the Apostle John?"

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN IS THE LAST BOOK OF THE BIBLE TO BE WRITTEN AND GOD USED A VERY SPECIAL APOSTLE NAMED JOHN TO WRITE IT.

Biographies of people are always interesting and usually important. **But when biographical information about a person is found in the Bible it is more than just interesting and important, it is inspired.** It is God, who chooses to give us great detail concerning the Apostle John, and we want to look at nine Biographical facts of his life that God inspired:

BIOGRAPHICAL FACT #1 – John’s family .

John’s father was Zebedee. We do not get much information about Zebedee’s faith, but we do about his mother. John’s mother was Salome, the sister of Mary - the mother of our Lord (Matthew 27:55-56*; Mark 15:40; John 19:25*) and his older brother was James (Mark 1:19; 3:17). So we may conclude that John was the cousin of Jesus because Mary and Salome were sisters. It is possible that both Zebedee and his wife Salome were believers in Jesus Christ. This explains why Zebedee did not offer any objections, when his two sons - James and John - accepted a call to follow Jesus Christ. Salome’s faith is definitely seen in the fact that she believed Jesus would eventually establish a Kingdom on earth and she wanted her two sons sitting on His right hand and His left hand when He set it up (Matthew 20:20-28). This also explains why she followed Jesus to His crucifixion (Mark 15:40 / Matthew 27:55-56). It is highly probable that both James and John came from a home that promoted faith in Jesus Christ. When a child is raised in that environment, there is a good chance he will end up believing too. John was from Bethsaida, which was also the city of Andrew and Peter (John 1:44 / Luke 5:10), located at the north end of the Sea of Galilee.

BIOGRAPHICAL FACT #2 – John’s occupation .

John was a successful fisherman from Bethsaida (also the city of Andrew and Peter - John 1:44 / Luke 5:10), located at the north end of the Sea of Galilee, near the mouth of the Jordan River. John’s father owned a very prosperous fishing business on the Sea of Galilee. In fact, their business was so lucrative that Zebedee had servants working for him (Mark 1:19-20). John must have been a person of means because we know that John, at a relatively young age, had his own house in Jerusalem (John 19:27), and perhaps part owner of one in Capernaum (Mark 1:21, 29). It is clear that both James and John knew the fishing business and were successful at it. In fact, they were working in the business when they were called to follow Jesus Christ (Matthew 4:21-22). It appears later that after James and John initially met Jesus, they returned to their home area and were in a business partnership with Peter (Luke 5:9-11). John was a tough, rough, hardworking, outdoors type of guy, his occupation as a fisherman demanded that. He would have had a wind-burnt face and calluses on his hands. He had to be somewhat fearless to go out to sea. He was a rugged and tough man with a personality God could use.

BIOGRAPHICAL FACT #3 – John’s age .

John was a young man when he met Jesus Christ. In fact, most scholars believe he was the youngest apostle to follow Jesus Christ. Philip Schaff said that based on the unanimous testimony of antiquity we could conclude John was 10 years younger than Jesus (*History of The Christian Church*, Vol. 1, p. 193). We may conclude this based on the fact that at the end of Christ’s first visit to earth, He classified both Peter and John as younger rather than older (John 21:18ff). Furthermore, many believe based on the fact that John outran Peter to the tomb, that he was younger than Peter (John 20:4). If we date Christ’s public ministry as being A.D. 30-33, which would be when He called John and we conclude that John lived to around A.D. 100, **John would have been in his mid to upper twenties when he left everything to follow Jesus Christ.** God does powerful things with young people who yield their lives to Him. John is proof of that.

BIOGRAPHICAL FACT #4 – John’s conversion.

John’s conversion was not a dramatic one like Paul. You can’t pinpoint it or date it. Some people have dramatic conversions and some don’t. John didn’t. John’s conversion to Jesus Christ seems to have followed a specific progressive chronology clearly connected to John the Baptist. It appears as though John may have been a young man who was very interested in religious things. Dr. Scroggie observed that there are 124 references to the O.T. in John’s gospel, which indicates John knew much about the O.T. (*A Guide To The Gospels*, p. 426). We also know that John was known by the High Priest, Caiaphas (John 18:15), which would indicate he was a regular visitor to the Temple. The actual distance from Bethsaida to Jerusalem is about 85 miles. The distance from Bethsaida to Nazareth, where Jesus grew up is about 25 miles. To be willing to travel these distances as a young man to these places to learn things about God demanded a tremendous interest and dedication to religious and spiritual things.

It also appears as though John started following John the Baptist, as one of his disciples (John 1:35-37). He believed John was telling the truth and recognized him as the forerunner of the Messiah. When John the Baptist pointed out Jesus as being the Lamb of God, the two disciples, one being Andrew and the other John, went and spent a day with Jesus (John 1:39).

This apparently was a key turning point in John’s life. He was a dedicated disciple of John the Baptist, but he was drawn away from him into a relationship with Jesus Christ because of the true teaching of John. John was the one who pointed to Jesus and said “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29, 36). In other words, John the eventual Apostle heard John the Baptist teach truth about Christ and he followed him right to Christ. He left the old Judaistic religious law system to embrace grace because of the dispensational preaching and teaching of John the Baptist (John 1:17). There are many today who need to break from law and embrace grace. That is exactly what John did. **Just because one is religious, does not mean one has a relationship with Jesus Christ.**

John saw himself as a sinner who needed to be saved from his sins. John’s faith started right and started sound because it started off under a God-called and God-illuminated preacher. Spurgeon said this very point from the life of John proves that the church needs a preacher who is alive to the Scriptures and to God or it will be dead (Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Spurgeon’s Sermons on New Testament Men*, pp. 46-47). **It was John the Baptist’s preaching about Christ that led John the eventual Apostle to Christ!**

BIOGRAPHICAL FACT #5 – John’s commission and ministry.

When Jesus called James and John to be His disciples, they immediately followed Him (Mark 1:20). It is stressed that John “left everything” to follow Christ (Luke 5:11; Matthew 4:22; Mark 1:20).

Some have said that wouldn’t mean leaving much, just a boat and a few fishing nets. However, it was far more than that, as John Kitto said they left homes, family, friends and neighbors, all relationships “in whom their hearts delighted” (*Kitto’s Daily Bible Illustrations*, Vol. 2, p. 543). They abandoned their habits of lifestyle and a lucrative occupation which abundantly provided for them to follow One who did not seem to have any worldly advantage. Jesus seemed to be poor and often subject to peril. You cannot possibly leave any more than to leave “everything.” That is precisely what John did.

John was later commissioned to be one of the twelve Apostles (Luke 9:1, 10), whose responsibility it was to go out and proclaim and preach. John was the kind of man who would leave everything to do what God wanted him to do. **It would seem that the primary ministry of John was not church planting, like Paul, but church watering and stabilizing.** Some ministries are planting ministries and some are watering ministries. Peter and Paul were planters and John was a waterer. As we track him, we discover that he would move into an area with an already established church in it and would instruct and teach it.

BIOGRAPHICAL FACT #6 – John’s character .

John’s character was actually defined and named by Jesus Christ. He gave John and his brother James the name Boanerges, which means “Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17). Someone once said, “When God makes a prophet, He does not unmake the man.” **Your personality will become the best it can ever become when Jesus Christ is in charge of it.** God could use John’s fire and He can use you. John needed to learn sound doctrine, which was a process. For example, John had a fiery zeal and a passionate intensity that was ready to call down fire from heaven on people (Luke 9:54-55). In the context of Luke, John had not yet learned that under law you condemn, but under grace you offer salvation. We know that this passion did not die down in his twilight years of life because when he writes III John, he warns the church to do something about Diotrephes, or he would come and do something about him (III John 9-10). We also know that God used John to write Revelation, which is a book that thunders forth the wrath of God. John was no namby-pamby when it came to defending and heralding truth. There is a famous story about John in church history in which he had apparently gone to a public bath house in Ephesus to take a bath. When he went in he discovered that a heretic, named Cerinthus, who denied the incarnation of the Lord, was in the bath house and he got out, ran for the door and urged his companions to get out of there because Cerinthus was an enemy of God’s truth (Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, pp. 138-139). This occurred later in life; John still had his fiery spirit.

BIOGRAPHICAL FACT #7 – John’s commitment .

John was totally committed to Jesus Christ. John is the only apostle who risked his life and went into Christ’s trials and was known by the high priest (John 18:15). He was the only one who went with Him to the cross (John 19:26-27). Both he and Peter were given a special assignment to prepare the final Passover meal (Luke 22:8-13) and at that meal John sat right next to Jesus (John 13:23-25). The night of Christ’s betrayal, John, his brother James and Peter went with Him when Christ was very emotional (Matthew 26:37-38) and these three fell asleep because they were so sad (Luke 22:45). John was totally committed to Jesus Christ.

In fact, **history says that John was the only apostle who never married** because he was so absorbed in his commitment to Christ that he had no room left in his heart for any woman. This may be the very reason that Jesus put John in charge of caring for Mary (John 19:26-27). John was Mary’s nephew and he was not married and would have been in a good position to take care of her. Just imagine what it would have been like for John to talk to Mary about Jesus. It is interesting that in all of their reminiscing, John does not refer to Jesus’ boyhood days about which he would have known much.

In all reality, John left his lucrative business at a young age and stayed with Jesus Christ for 3 plus years and then stayed committed to Christ for another 65-70 years. During that time he had learned that all of the other apostles were dead, most martyred. But he never wavered in his commitment to Jesus Christ. **The last thing he does before he dies is writes a Gospel account of Jesus Christ.** We will let John tell it his way for his gospel is an inspired record of Jesus Christ and the things that meant so much to him.

BIOGRAPHICAL FACT #8 – John’s scholarship.

When John appeared with Peter before the rulers and elders and scribes in Jerusalem, they classified them as “uneducated” and “untrained” men (Acts 4:5, 13). In fact, of all of the Gospel writers, John’s vocabulary is most limited. John has a vocabulary of about 600 Greek words and most of them are one or two syllable words (John Phillips, *Exploring The Gospels - John*, p. 5). John typically writes in simple short sentences. Because of this some assume that this former fisherman was not a Biblical scholar, but when you carefully study the Gospel of John, you discover he was a very scholarly researcher who was focused on presenting the most minute details as a very deep thinking theologian. In fact, John presents things as an eye-witness that others leave out. For example:

- 1) John was precise when it came to persons - John 6:5, 7; 12:20-21; 14:5, 8, 22, 23; 19:39
There are 23 specifically named people in the Gospel of John., some of whom no one else names (John 18:10 / Matthew 26:51 / Mark 14:47 - by this time Peter was dead so this was no threat to him)
- 2) John was precise when it came to time - John 6:4; 7:2; 10:22; 12:1, 12
- 3) John was precise when it came to numbers - John 1:35; 2:6; 6:9, 19
- 4) John was precise when it came to places - John 1:28; 3:23; 4:46; 5:14; 6:59
- 5) John was precise when it came to events -John 13:1-20; 18:15-27; 21:1-14 - i.e. 19:33 - unbroke legs
- 6) John was precise when it came to language, i.e. John 14:17 - note use of prepositions
John was a tremendous scholar given over to minute detail. He obviously was bilingual, knowing Greek and Hebrew and often he would explain words carefully and clearly - John 1:38, 42; 4:25; 9:7; 19:13. Also even though his sentences are short, they are powerful, as Dr. Scroggie said they may be ‘poor in number, but they are profound in meaning’ (*A Guide To The Gospels*, p. 414). We would challenge any to try and reach the theological depth of meaning in the short sentences that open the book: “In the beginning was the Word.” “The Word was with God.” “The Word was God.”

The Apostle John may not have spent time in the formal classrooms of the Jewish scholastic institutions, but having spent three years with Jesus Christ, he became a spiritual giant with a brilliant mind. I am convinced that when a person yields his heart and mind to Jesus Christ, that heart and mind soars to new, deep, powerful heights of learning and understanding - whether fisherman or farmer, whether factory worker or computer worker, whether teacher or engineer, whether doctor or lawyer. No one’s mind will ever reach its full depth until the mind is yielded to God. John was a fisherman who yielded his heart and mind to God and he became one of the deepest theologians to ever exist on this earth. I am sure it is not a coincidence that some great

theologians bear his name - John Chrysostom - the golden mouthed Biblical orator; John Wycliffe - the morning star of the reformation; John Calvin - the great theologian of the reformation; John Walvoord - the great defender of pre-trib, pre-mill eschatology; John Miles - key to Bible Church movement.

BIOGRAPHICAL FACT #9 – John’s chronology after Christ’s ascension.

John’s movement as an Apostle after Christ’s ascension is fascinating, inspired and practical:

- 1) John apparently stayed in Jerusalem for a time after the ascension and accompanied the Apostle Peter to the temple on the day of Pentecost - Acts 1:13; 2:14; 3:1
- 2) Later, on the Day of Pentecost, both Peter and John were put into prison for preaching the Truth - Acts 4:3, 13. This is his first exposure to going to jail for preaching.
- 3) When Peter and John were released from prison, they were both told not to preach Christ, to which both boldly declared they would not stop preaching Him - Acts 4:18-20
- 4) Sometime later, both Peter and John were sent by the Jerusalem church to Samaria because they had heard that the Samaritans were responding to the Word of God and also because this was part of their Apostolic assignment - Acts 8:14; 1:8
- 5) After returning from Samaria to Jerusalem, it is probable that John took Mary and moved to Galilee, which explains why Paul did not see John the first time he went to Jerusalem (Galatians 1:18-19). Frederic Godet says that Mary would not have felt much attraction to Jerusalem because as a mother she had watched her own Son die there, plus her fondest memories of Christ would be in Galilee and since John and her sister owned a home there, it would have been a logical place for him to take her (Frederic Godet, *Commentary on John’s Gospel*, p. 35). Furthermore, Jesus told John to take care of His mother, not let her be persecuted in Jerusalem. It would be safe in Galilee.
- 6) There is some evidence that Mary may have died around A.D. 48 (Schaff, Vol. 1, p. 440) and that John moved back to Jerusalem around A.D. 50-51, which explains why Paul met John on his second visit to Jerusalem some 14 years later (Galatians 2:1, 9). John probably is pushing 50 years old.
- 7) James, John’s brother, was executed by Herod and the Apostle Peter was put into prison and John was not with them, probably having left Jerusalem for the Gentile regions (Acts 12:1-3), which again was in accordance with the Acts 1:8 commission. We find John in midlife still focused on doing and fulfilling God’s will.
- 8) Eventually John visited Pauline churches in Asia Minor and ultimately made his home in Ephesus. One thing that may have helped draw him to Ephesus is that there were some of his old friends who had been disciples of John the Baptist (Acts 19:1-7). Paul had spent three years in Ephesus and the word of God powerfully grew (Acts 19:20). We may assume that since Paul does not mention John in Acts 20 or in Ephesians or I and II Timothy, that John did not arrive there until sometime after A.D. 68. If he arrived 9 years before he

was put on Patmos, the year would be A.D. 73. The fact that he lived in Ephesus is an historical fact which is verified by numerous historical accounts - Irenaeus, Polycarp, Eusebius, Clement, Jerome. Frederic Godet said that Ephesus became a major center of all the churches in part because of John's presence (*Commentary on John's Gospel*, p. 38). Philip Schaff says Ephesus, through the labors of Paul and John, became the "chief theater in church history" during the last half of the first century and greater part of the second century (*The History of the Christian Church*, Vol. 1, p. 198).

9) John was arrested in Ephesus and imprisoned on the island of Patmos. Jerome says John was banished to Patmos in the 14th year after Nero, which would be A.D. 82 and that he was released after the death of Domitian (reigned from A.D. 81-96), which would be A.D. 96. It was during this island imprisonment that John wrote the book of Revelation (Rev. 1:9) (Cited from William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, Vol. 1, p. 41). John's age at the point of his imprisonment would be in his late 70s.

10) John was released from Patmos by permission of Nerva, who reigned for one year after Domitian and he stayed in Ephesus until the time of Trajan, whose reign began in A.D. 98. At this point, John would have been in his 90s.

11) Jerome claims that John reached an extreme old age in Ephesus and died and was buried there. Polycrates, Pastor of the Church of Ephesus (A.D. 189-198), wrote a letter to a leader in Rome and in it he said "John, who had been a witness and a teacher, now sleeps in Ephesus" (Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, p. 258).

If John lived 26 more years after he got off Patmos, he would have lived well into his 100s and into the beginning of the second century. Historical records have placed John's age at death as being 100-120 years old.

There is an amazing story about John in his final days of life, which may be verified by many writings from Church history, too numerous to mention. John never wanted to miss a church service and as he reached an extreme age, he asked his disciples to carry him to church on Sunday, which according to Jerome was no easy task of getting him to the church. Because he was the last living apostle, all the people at church always wanted him to say something and Jerome says in his final times at church, the only thing he could say was "Little Children, love one another." When asked, why he kept saying that, John's answer was, "because it is the Lord's commandment, and if this is done, enough is done" (Cited from Thomas Whitelaw, *Commentary on John*, p. li and William Van Doren, *Gospel of John*, p. xviii).

When John was first fishing in the Sea of Galilee, he never imagined all of this would happen to him, but it did. That is the way it is for any who believe in Jesus Christ and purpose to follow Him. Life becomes an amazing and exciting adventure that will develop you and lead you all the way to heaven. It is never too late to make changes in life, to grow, to learn and to blossom in faith. That is the story of John's life.