

LIFE WITH THE MASTER

“The Disciple Whom Jesus Loved”

of Jesus and John

Introduction

John 19:25-27

25 Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene.

26 When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son!

27 Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home. KJV¹

Who was this disciple who was “standing by” who Jesus loved? None other than the Apostle John.

John 21:20-24

20 Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee?

21 Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do?

22 Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.

23 Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?

24 **This is the disciple** which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true.

The disciple who wrote this gospel is the disciple “whom Jesus loved,” the one who leaned on His breast during the Last Supper. John’s transformation under the tutelage of the Lord Jesus may not seem as dramatic as Paul’s, but it was certainly no less profound. As we look at who John was and how he was and then see what he became as a result of his life-changing relationship with Jesus we will gain a deeper appreciation of how our Lord never leaves us the way He found us.

I. Who He Was

1. A Disciple of John the Baptist

John 1:35-40

35 Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples;

36 And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!

37 And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.

38 Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou?

39 He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour.

¹ All references are from the King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

40 One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

Andrew gets mentioned by name, as does Simon (and shortly to follow Philip and Nathanael). Guess who never gets mentioned by name in the Gospel of John? John!

John, as well as all the rest of the twelve, was a disciple of the Baptist prior to being a disciple of Jesus.

Acts 1:21-22

21 Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,

22 Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.

Not only had they been disciples of John the Baptist, they were actually present the day that Jesus was baptized!

2. Son of Zebedee

A. His father

Mark 1:16-20

16 Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.

17 And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men.

18 And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him.

19 And when he had gone a little further thence, he saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets.

20 And straightway he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him.

That their father had hired servants tells us something of his social status. His fishing business had grown beyond just a family occupation. He was employing other people in addition to his sons.

B. His mother

Luke 8:2-3

2 And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils,

3 And Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, **which ministered unto him of their substance.**

These women were major financial and commodity suppliers to the ministry of Jesus Christ. One of the women who ministered to Him out of her substance was Salome, the wife of Zebedee.

Matthew 27:55-56

55 And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him:

56 Among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children.

That his father had hired servants and his mother helped supply the ministry of Jesus tells us that John came from a somewhat affluent family, even if he was a fisherman.

Matt 20:20-21

20 Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him.

21 And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.

Not only was John's mother devoted to Jesus, she was also ambitious with regard to the placement of her sons.

3. Related to the Lord

It is an interesting study to track all the familial relationships that surrounded Jesus' ministry. Most are aware that Jesus and John the Baptist were at least second cousins (Elizabeth being Mary's cousin – Luke 1:36). But most are not aware of the Lord's relationship to James and John.

A. Salome, Mary's sister

To understand that the mother of James and John was none other than the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus, takes a little ferreting out. But by use of the Hermeneutical tools of comparative and progressive mention, it becomes apparent that when Jesus asked James and John to follow Him, they didn't abandon their father for a complete stranger.

Mark 15:40-41

40 There were also women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome;

41 (Who also, when he was in Galilee, followed him, and ministered unto him;) and many other women which came up with him unto Jerusalem.

The two women we want to make note of for the purpose of this study are Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses and Salome. The first question is: Who are James the less and Joses?

Matthew 13:55

Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?

After Jesus, Mary had four sons and several daughters as well. The names of the elder two were James and Joses. I believe many commentators are blinded to the identity of James the less because most come from a cessationist background. They don't understand the transmission of the apostolic office. So they force themselves to the conclusion that James the less is the same as James, the son of Alphaeus.

Luke 6:14-16

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.

When Luke writes "Judas the brother of James," he does so to an audience that is well aware of who James is. (Two Jameses had been mentioned in the list, since he didn't bother to specify which James Jude was the brother of it seems natural to conclude that he was the brother of neither.)

Galatians 1:17-19

17 Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.
18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.
19 But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother.

James was the leading overseer of the church in Jerusalem. He was the one who gave the definitive decision for the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15.

Acts 15:12-13, 19

12 Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.
13 And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me:
19 Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God:

By the time of the writing of the epistles and the gospels, he was simply known as James.

1 Cor 15:5-7

5 And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve:
6 After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.
7 After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.

Jude 1

Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called:

So Mary, the mother of James and Joses, is none other than Mary the mother of Jesus.

John 19:25

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus **his mother, and his mother's sister**, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene.

At the cross are His mother and His mother's sister.

Matthew 27:55-56

55 And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him:

56 Among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children. [Salome – Mark 15:40]

Now, we know that Mary the wife of Cleophas and the mother of Zebedee's children can't be the same woman. Matthew simply doesn't mention the wife of Cleophas. By process of elimination, the mother of Zebedee's children must then be the sister of the Virgin Mary.

B. Related to John the Baptist

It stands to reason, then, that if Salome is Mary's sister, then John the Apostle was also related to John the Baptist. John's family was a Levitical family. Was Mary's?

C. From a priestly family?

John 18:16

But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out **that other disciple**, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter.

Elsewhere in his gospel, John calls himself "the other disciple."

John 20:2

Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him.

*This "other disciple" was well know to the high priest and could gain entrance into his palace. Based on this and John's description of the priestly activities within the Temple (albeit the **real** temple in heaven and that by Revelation, no pun intended),*

many have conjectured that it is quite possible that the Zebedees were a Levitical, if not a priestly, family.²

II. How He Was

1. Ambitious

Mark 10:35-37

35 And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire.

36 And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you?

37 They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory.

This is all the more startling when one compares it to what they had just heard from the Master.

Mark 10:32-34

32 And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid. And he took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him,

33 Saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles:

34 And they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the third day he shall rise again.

On the heels of telling them what He must go through in self-sacrifice, they approach Him with self-seeking for position! But the Lord is gracious. He lets them know what they must go through and who they must ask.

Mark 10:38-40

² Chapter Seven - At Night in the Temple

These naturally suggest the twofold inference that the Book of Revelation and the Fourth Gospel must have been written before the Temple services had actually ceased, and by one who had not merely been intimately acquainted with, but probably at one time an actor in them. *

* This is not the place for further critical discussions. Though the arguments in support of our view are only inferential, they seem to us none the less conclusive. It is not only that the name of John (given also to the son of the priest Zacharias) reappears among the kindred of the high-priest (Acts 4:6), nor that his priestly descent would account for that acquaintance with the high-priest (John 18:15,16) which gave him access apparently into the council-chamber itself, while Peter, for whom he had gained admittance to the palace, was in 'the porch'; nor yet that, though residing in Galilee, the house of 'his own' to which he took the mother of Jesus (John 19:27) was probably at Jerusalem, like that of other priests--notably of the Levite family of Barnabas (Acts 12:12)--a supposition confirmed by his apparent entertainment of Peter, when Mary Magdalene found them together on the morning of the resurrection (John 20:2). But it seems highly improbable that a book so full of liturgical allusions as the Book of Revelation--and these, many of them, not to great or important points, but to minutia--could have been written by any other than a priest, and one who had at one time been in actual service in the Temple itself, and thus become so intimately conversant with its details, that they came to him naturally, as part of the imagery he employed. (from Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple*, Electronic Database Copyright ©1999 by BibleSoft)

38 But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?

39 And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized:

40 But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared.

And He doesn't leave it there. Jesus then instructs them on how to be great in the kingdom.

Mark 10:41-45

41 And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John.

42 But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them.

43 But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister:

44 And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.

45 For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

2. Zealous

A. Son of thunder

Mark 3:17

And James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; and he surnamed³ them Boanerges, which is, The sons of thunder⁴:

Let's just say that the brothers were not characterized by a meek and quite spirit! I don't think that the Lord's surname for them was disparaging in any sense. Thunder in Scripture is often used to describe the voice of God. One is left to gather that if the brothers were not already "mighty in speech," the Lord intended them to be.

The thunder could also signify their mercurial temperament.

B. Jealous

Mark 9:38-39

38 And John 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.

³ The predominant use of one of the words translated "surnamed" (epithemi) [the other word used in the combination is onoma – name; he laid a name on them] is in the "laying on" of hands. Other interesting uses are the putting on of the crown of thorns and the laying on of stripes.

⁴ It is interesting that the word *brote* (translated "thunder") appears only twelve times in the New Testament. One of them is here in Mark, used to describe James and John. The other eleven uses are by John himself (John 12:29, Rev. 4:5; 6:1; 8:5; 10:4 twice; 11:19; 14:2; 16:18; 19:6) most often in reference to spiritual utterance or voices (i.e., God, angels, worshipers).

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.

This reminds me of the reaction of another jealously protective young man.

Num 11:25-29

25 And the LORD came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the spirit that was upon him, and gave it unto the seventy elders: and it came to pass, that, when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease.

26 But there remained two of the men in the camp, the name of the one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad: and the spirit rested upon them; and they were of them that were written, but went not out unto the tabernacle: and they prophesied in the camp.

27 And there ran a young man, and told Moses, and said, Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp.

28 And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his young men, answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them.

29 And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake? would God that all the LORD's people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!

The difference between Joshua and John is that Joshua asked Moses to forbid the two men in the camp but John forbid the man casting out demons himself! That man was operating the power of God outside of John's theology and it upset him. "You can't do that," he told the man. "You're not one of us!"

C. Fire breather

Luke 9:51-56

51 And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem,

52 And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him.

53 And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem.

54 And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?

55 But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.

56 For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.

I don't mean to sound sacrilegious, but do you wonder if the Lord rebuked them with a smile in his heart? Have you ever had a child behave badly by misusing a trait you admire? These guys were ready to smoke the unbelievers! Right fervor, wrong target.

3. Devoted

A. The Last Supper

John 13:20-23

20 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.

21 When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.

22 Then the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake.

23 Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved.

We are not sure what seat John will get in the Kingdom of Christ (though we know it will be a throne – Matt 19:28), but we do know what seat he received at the Last Supper. John was leaning on Jesus' bosom; putting him on the Lord's right hand (Judas received the chief seat, the one above Jesus on His left).

B. At the Cross

John 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!

No other apostle is mentioned at the foot of the cross. And it is John whom Jesus chooses to care for His mother. The love and care of the Savior here is almost overwhelming. Even while paying the price for the sins of the world, He makes sure to honor His mother by providing a place for her!

C. Race to the tomb

John 20:1-8

1 The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre.

2 Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him.

3 Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre.

4 So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre.

5 And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. [*Was this a priestly reservation against being defiled by a grave?*]

6 Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie,

7 And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.

8 Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed.

It is only at the tomb that John hesitates. But in his eagerness, he beats Peter there. John states that when he went into the sepulcher and saw, he believed. Peter, on the other hand, hadn't quite figured out what to think.

Luke 24:12

Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulchre; and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass.

III. Who He Became

1. That Other Disciple

John never identifies himself by name in his gospel. He is one of the two disciples of the Baptist who heard him say of Jesus "Behold, the Lamb of God!" in John 1:36-37. He calls himself "that other disciple" in John 18:16 and 20:3.

John 1:36-37

36 And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!

37 And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.

John 18:16

But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out **that other disciple**, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter.

John 20:3 Peter therefore went forth, and **that other disciple**, and came to the sepulchre.

Most date the writing of the Gospel of John later than the other gospels. The humbleness of the mature apostle is evident by his obvious omission of any direct reference to himself. This is a far cry from requesting either of the highest seats of honor in the kingdom!

2. Servant of Jesus

1 Peter 1:1

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,

2 Peter 1:1

Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ:

In both of his epistles, Peter identifies himself as "an apostle of Jesus Christ." John in his second and third epistles simply identifies himself as "the elder." In 1 John, he doesn't even identify himself!

Revelation 1:1

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John:

In the Revelation he simply identifies himself as a servant of Jesus Christ. This again seems worlds away from striving for pole position! John is one who learned that he who would be great must be servant of all.⁵

3. The Disciple of Love

John doesn't just define himself as the disciple "whom he loved" (John 19:26). He more frequently states specifically that he is the disciple "whom Jesus loved."⁶ This love from Jesus poured out of John's pen more frequently than any other New Testament writer.

A. Love stats

Statistics in and of themselves may not be able to give us deep insights into spiritual truths. But they do help in giving us some perspective.

i. Agapao – verb

Agapao (to love as God loves) is used by Matthew 8 times, Mark 5 times, and Luke 13 times. Paul uses it in his writings 32 times. These men combined are responsible for writing 74.6% of the New Testament. John is responsible for penning only 17.6%⁷, yet he uses the term 72 times – more than the other four combined!

ii. Agape – noun

Agape is used by Matthew once, Luke once, and Mark never. John uses the word a total of 30 times and Paul 76 times. This puts Paul's agapao/agape total at 108 and John's at 102. But bear in mind that John's predominant use of the word is the verb form, while Paul's is the noun. John writes mostly about loving as an action; Paul about love as an object.

iii. Phileo – verb

Phileo is often called "soul love." It is the love we associate with tender affection and deep emotion. Matthew uses the word 5 times, Mark once, and Luke and Paul both use it twice. John uses the word 15 times.

The Love Totals: John 117 – Paul 110!⁸

B. He loved first

1 John 4:9-11

⁵ Matt 23:11

⁶ John 13:23; 20:2; 21:7, 20

⁷ These percentages are based on verse count, not word count.

⁸ A proportional comparison would be even more startling. John's love-to-verse ratio is 1:12, Paul's 1:18.

- 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.

In John we find a disciple that is confident in the love of the Lord. The love Jesus had for him became his very identity. This is seen by his referring to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” Truly, the Lord loved them all. But John claims that love for himself. And that love changed him into the character of Christ. He sacrificed himself to exhibit the love of Christ to others.

C. John’s last words

It is reported that in the latter stages of his life, John was responsible primarily for the church at Ephesus. He was called to Rome, where they put him in a cauldron of boiling oil to execute him. The Lord miraculously protected him and he came out of the trial unharmed. Domitian then exiled him to the island of Patmos, where John wrote Revelation.⁹

It is supposed that he lived as late as the time of Trajan (98 AD)¹⁰. When all capacity to work and teach was gone and he could no longer even stand, he asked to be taken to the assembly of believers, and once there he delivered his last message. “Little children,” he said with his feeble voice, “love one another.”¹¹

Conclusion

The Lord took John from being a fisherman to a fisher of men¹², from an exclusionary insider to a globe trotting evangelist, from fiery vengeance to the burning passion of the love of God. John witnessed a carpenter being baptized in the River Jordan. He followed a rabbi who was reaching out to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He believed in a Messiah who did miracles. He watched the Christ being crucified. He ate food from the hand of the resurrected Lord. And toward the end of his days, he fell down as one dead when he saw the Alpha and the Omega – the glorified Lord Jesus Christ.

These experiences did not leave him unchanged. He knew first hand the Love of the Master and the reciprocal devotion that it deserved.

1 John 5:20-21

20 And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

⁹ From *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*.

¹⁰ From *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*.

¹¹ From *New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*.

¹² Mark 1:16-20