

Third Quarter 2008

Adult Sabbath School Lessons

Special Insights No. 7

(Produced by the Editorial Board of the 1888 Message Study Committee)

The Apostle John

We have the privilege of studying this week, one of God's greatest missionaries—John the beloved. 1 John 1:1, 3 says, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— ... that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ."

The man who wrote these words and the fisherman whom Jesus called in Luke 5 were substantively different men. In fact John and his big brother James were quite colorful. John did not naturally possess this loving character seen in 1 John 1:1, 3. As a disciple John was proud, ambitious for title and position, exclusive, and resentful under injury. He had an evil temper and possessed a desire for revenge. Medieval art paints John as a meek, mild, pale-skinned, effeminate person reclining on Jesus shoulder. But such was not the case. In fact he was a rugged, hard-edged, intolerant, explosive man like his older brother. Jesus perceived this and called he and his brother "Boanerges," "Sons of Thunder" (Mark 3:17). Jesus, knowing these men's hearts and seeing what they might become through redeeming love, placed them in His most intimate inner circle, and so the process, the journey of transformation from "Son of Thunder" to "the disciple whom Jesus loved" was begun.

John's character flaws came out often on this journey. Luke 9 records three such episodes, which are instructive. Jesus had just taken his three most trusted, intimate friends to the mountain where He was transfigured. The veil of His human flesh was peeled back, giving them a glimpse of His glory. Matthew says the sight was so shocking that the disciples fell on their faces (Matt. 17:6). No one on earth had experienced anything remotely like this since Moses caught a glimpse of God's back after being hidden in the cleft of the rock from the full display of the glory of God. It was after this that Luke records: "Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem ... And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans ... But they did not receive Him. ... And when ... James and John saw this, they said, 'Lord do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?'" (Luke 9:51-55). After all, we read how Elijah did it, and we know how we can do it, and it won't be a problem. Jesus rebuked them, because He "did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them" (Luke 9:56).

God is *Agape*—*agape* does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek it's own, is not provoked; does not rejoice in iniquity; bears all things, hopes all things" (1 Cor. 13:4-7). Human love is based on the value of the person but God's love creates value in people. *Agape* is given freely and is in active pursuit of all mankind.

On another occasion James and John were arguing over who would be the greatest in the kingdom and occupy the position of highest honor. Jesus, knowing the pride and ambition that motivated this request, said, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them ... but not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am

among you as the One who serves" (Luke 22:25-27). Matthew adds, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (20:28). Human love seeks to climb higher, but *agape* dares to step down (Phil. 2:5-8). Human love seeks immortality as a reward, but the Son of God was willing to lose eternal life (Psalm 22 tells us poignantly about that).

Throughout John's Gospel, he never once mentions his own name. The apostle refuses to speak of himself in reference to himself. Instead he speaks of himself in reference to Christ. Rather than write his name, which would focus attention on himself, he refers to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved," giving glory to Jesus for having loved such a man. John's appellation of himself is not arrogance nor is it meant to elevate himself as the only disciple whom Jesus loved. Rather he was utterly in awe of the marvel that Christ loved him. Jesus loved all his disciples "to the end," but it seems there was a unique way in which John gripped this reality, and he was humbled by it. Ellen White says in *Acts of the Apostles*, page 543: "The one who stands nearest to Christ will be he who has drunk most deeply of His spirit of self-sacrificing love,—love that 'vaunteth not itself, ... is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil' (1 Cor. 13:4, 5)." She also says on page 545, "John could talk of the Father's love as no other of the disciples could." The love of Christ transformed this "Son of Thunder" into a son of love and grace.

Many desiring holiness and obedience seek to fix the fruit, when in fact we have a root problem. The only motivation that will make us obedient to all the commandments of God and bring in everlasting righteousness is *agape*. In these last days a higher motivation will prevail in the church—concern for Christ and His reward. Ego-centric motivation based on fear of hell or hope of heaven is not enough to prepare the bride of Christ for the marriage supper of the Lamb. In *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, page 108, Ellen White says, "The kingdom of God's grace is now being established, as day by day hearts that have been full of sin and rebellion yield to the sovereignty of His love."

The disciple whom Jesus loved mentions love in his Gospel and epistles more than 80 times. He has a message for us in 1 John 3:1, 2: "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! ... Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." John says this love is beyond words, but he asks us to behold it because when we do we will be "transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18). This transformation will produce the translation generation, for the "marriage of the Lamb has come, His wife has made herself ready" (Rev. 19:7). Praise God.

God bless us as we study and share this week.

—Lyndi Schwartz

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