

Text: John 21:24

Title: "This is the disciple which testified and wrote"

Time: 1/29/2023 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: How many of you know someone whose first name is *John*, *J-o-h-n*? Social Security records show that in 1922 and 1923, the name *John* was the name most frequently given to boys born in the United States. From 1924 to 1928, *John* fell to second place, and then from 1929 to 1952, the name *John* was the third most given name. It dropped to fourth in 1953 and 1954, and then held fifth place for four more years.

It stayed somewhere in the top-five-most-given-names from 1959 until 1973, the year it dropped out of that category for good. I saw a statistic that said that its overall average rank historically now stands at 176th, meaning that in recent years far fewer babies have been named *John* by their parents.

*John* is obviously a Christian name, and as our country has become less Christian in its character, we have named fewer of our babies *John*. It is interesting how you can use the name's relative popularity to pinpoint this decline in American culture.

What makes *John* a Christian name, of course, is its appearance in the New Testament. There we find that four people bear the name *John*. A John served on the Sanhedrin that attempted to silence the Apostles, Peter and John, after Peter healed the lame man in Acts 4:6. John with Peter told this other John and his high-priestly relatives that they would obey God rather than man. *John* is also one of the names that belonged to John Mark, the author of the Gospel of Mark.

But the first John encountered in the New Testament is John the Baptist, the forerunner to the ministry of the Messiah promised in Isa. 40:1-5, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,

saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.' Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

John's Gospel gives evidence of the great influence John the Baptist had on John the Apostle of Christ and author of this Gospel. Our author was one of the Apostles who came to Christ by way of John the Baptist. John the Apostle tells us that story in the first chapter of his Gospel (1:35-40, "Again the next day after, John [the Baptist] stood, and two of his disciples. And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, 'Behold the Lamb of God!' And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. 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?' 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. One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother."). That was the day John, the unnamed second disciple of this passage, met Jesus Christ.

Later, Jesus would ask John and his older brother James to leave their father's boats and their fishermen nets to follow Him and to be made fishers of men (Mark 1:19-22, "And when he [Jesus] had gone a little farther thence, he saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets. And straightway he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants and went after him. And they went into Capernaum; and

straightway on the sabbath day, he entered into the synagogue and taught. And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes.”) That was the first day John began calling himself Jesus’s disciple, rather than the disciple of John the Baptist.

In our text he does so again after many years of ministry as Jesus’s disciple: “This is the disciple which testifieth of these things and wrote these things.” In our chapter, he is the one who saw Peter restored by the risen Christ. The Lord had a plan for him that was not to be shared with Peter for his approval. And we know today also, that he is the one after whom millions of baby boys have been named.

Our text makes clear that this disciple wants us to know who he is, and so our message this morning will be a biographical sketch of the Apostle John, the disciple who testified of these things and wrote them for us. I want us to learn from the example of John’s family, John’s temperament, John’s ministry, and John’s relationship to Christ this morning.

I. John’s family was together, serving the Lord (Mark 1:19-22).

Application: Our church is in prayer for our lost family members. As we pray those prayers, we are asking the Lord to give us the kind of family John had, one that was together, serving the Lord.

John’s family was a family of some means. You may have noticed from Mark 1 that Zebedee not only had his two boys working with him in his fishing enterprise, but also a number of hired servants. When Jesus called James and John to their ministry of becoming fishers of men, they left their father’s nets, his boats, his hired servants, and a profitable family business. What is clear from their immediate response to follow Christ, and Zebedee’s lack of objection, is that these

young men had been raised in a family committed to serving the Lord together.

Bible students conclude from a comparison of New Testament passages (Mark 15:40-41, 16:1, compared with Matt. 27:56; see also John 19:25, where Salome goes unnamed because she is John's mother) that John's mother, the wife of Zebedee, was the Salome we read about in the Gospels. She was the sister of Mary, the mother of the Lord, so John and his brother James were first cousins of Jesus. Undoubtedly, this family had been exposed to the truth of who Jesus is shortly after Mary and Joseph learned it from the angel.

Zebedee and Salome had raised their sons to love and to serve Christ, and when the call came, the family jumped together at the opportunity to serve. Zebedee willingly lost a couple of his best hands, but he kept earning money so Salome could be one of the ladies who accompanied Jesus and the twelve, offering the couple's financial support. James and John became fishers of men under the tutelage of their Lord. John's family was together, serving the Lord.

Do we desire to have a family that serves the Lord together? Can a blessing be any richer than that? Let's keep praying and pursuing in our witness our family members, that we might be together serving the Lord.

II. John's temperament was bold, thundering for the Lord (Mark 3:13-17).

Illustration: Our nation's forefather, Benjamin Franklin, is remembered in part for his many inventions. He was intrigued by electricity and agreed with the theory that thunder and electricity were the same thing. To test this theory, Franklin developed his famous kite and key experiment. While Franklin proved that thunder is electricity, no proof was necessary to know that thunder could be very damaging. Barns hit by

thunder would burn down. But with his knowledge that thunder would behave like electricity, Franklin invented the lightning rod to sit atop barns and conduct a lightning strike into the ground saving the structure. Franklin believed the lightning rod was his most important invention.

Application: In His selection of James and John as apostles, our Lord understood that He was dealing with some thunder. He gives them the nickname, "Sons of Thunder." The label makes us think of a motorcycle gang today. I believe the Lord saw value in the electricity of John's thunderous boldness, but He knew that it needed to be harnessed and brought under control.

It may be that John inherited his bold disposition more from his mother than from his father. On one occasion, Mother Salome asked Jesus to let her two sons rule in the kingdom on thrones next to His, setting off a firestorm among the apostles (Matt. 20:20-28). That took some boldness, but it was thunder that almost burnt the barn down. Jesus's lesson for his apostles that day was simple: "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant." John paid close attention.

On another occasion John desired to call down fire from heaven on some fellow disciples who were not in lockstep with those accompanying Christ (Mark 9:38-50). John had a zeal for keeping issues black and white, not tolerating any gray, but here again, John was boldly wrong.

But over time the thunder, still forceful, bold, and powerful, came under the control of the Holy Spirit's lightning rod. Petty partisanship became passionate love for truth and people. Eventually, all of God's people were his "little children," and those who would harm them were antichrists. False teaches were not to be tolerated in the house church (2 John 9-11), not even given a greeting of "Godspeed."

The story is told by Irenaeus about John's refusal to remain in a bathhouse where a known denier of the incarnation was taking a bath. He is quoted as saying: "Let us fly lest the bath fall on us, since Cerinthus is within, the enemy of the truth."

This boldness for truth was truth in love. John was bolder because he loved deeply. John uses the word for *love* 48 times in his Gospel, compared to 9 times by Matthew, 6 times by Mark, and 20 times by Luke. The Lord Jesus may never have to call us "Sons and daughters of thunder," but we need the love that caused John to be bold for his Lord.

That boldness comes through righteousness (Prov. 28:1, "The wicked flee when no man is pursuing, but the righteous are as bold as a lion") and prayer (Eph. 6:19, "And [pray] for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel"). If we know we are right, and we pray for boldness, we will be bold, and it will be electric power God uses for good.

III. John's ministry was out-front, leading for the Lord (Acts 3:1-11).

Application: Along with Peter, John provided key leadership in the church (the first miracle - Acts 3:1-11; the first defense in the face of persecution - Acts 4:13-19; the first assessment of the Samaritan believers - Acts 8:14; the first commendation of the ministry of Paul and Barnabas to the Gentiles - Gal. 2:9).

History remembers John's ministry at the local church of Ephesus after the departure of Paul. Polycarp, the pastor at Smyrna, was a cherished disciple of his. As pastor and elder, John determined to be a witness for his Savior. Westcott: "He sees the past and the future gathered up in the manifestation of the Son of God. This was the one fact in which the hope of the world lay. Of this he had himself been assured by evidence of sense and thought. This he was constrained to pro-

claim: 'We have seen and do testify.' He had no laboured process to go through: he saw. He had no constructive proof to develop: he bore witness. His source of knowledge was direct, and his mode of bringing conviction was to affirm" (xxxv). John's ministry was out front. He willingly led for the Lord. In this respect, our churches still need their Johns today.

IV. John's relationship with Christ was devout, reciprocating the Lord's love for him (John 21:20).

*Application: To reciprocate means to show, give, or feel something in return.* Reciprocation describes the nature of the relationship John had with Christ. Christ's love for John is first, and that produced John's love for Christ. He loved Christ because he knew that he was "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 21:20). That is the key to anyone's devotion to Christ – to really grasp as John did that I am the one whom Jesus loved. Have we grasped this truth this way?

John, along with his brother James and Peter, shared an inner-circle relationship with Jesus (Luke 8:51, 9:28, Mark 14:33), and of these three John's connection was the closest. He leaned on Jesus's breast at the Passover meal asking the sensitive question none others would ask (John 13:22-25); he followed Jesus to the cross when the others fled and denied they knew Him (John 18:15, 19:26); and He met the Lord's need for a believer to care for His mother (John 19:27).

Perhaps no one understood better Jesus's love than the Apostle John, and it is a purpose of His Gospel to let us know that He loves us too. Do you know Jesus loves you? Do you love Him in return?

*Conclusion: The reciprocating love of Christ is also captured by one of John's favorite phrases – one another.* The church father Jerome told a story about John and his favorite phrase: "When he tarried at Ephesus to extreme old age, and could

only with difficulty be carried to the church in the arms of his disciples, and was unable to give utterance to many words, he used to say no more at their several meetings than this, 'Little children, love one another.' At length the disciples and fathers who were there, wearied with hearing always the same words, said, 'Master, why dost thou always say this?' 'It is the Lord's command,' was his worthy reply, 'and if this be done, it is enough'" [Quoted in Westcott, xxxv].

"This is the disciple whom Jesus loved, and this is the disciple who testified of these things and wrote them, and we know his testimony is true." May we be ready to learn humbly and trustingly from the written testimony of the Gospel of the Apostle John.

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*