

## **Common Men, Uncommon Calling: John**

Luke 6:14

42-76

Let's open our Bibles again to the 6th chapter of Luke. We are continuing through the gospel of Luke. In verses 12 through 16 we have come to a section in which Luke introduces us to the twelve apostles. Verse 12 tells us that Jesus went off to the mountain to pray, spent the whole night in prayer to God, certainly discerning out of that prayer what it was that God wanted in terms of the twelve, or who it was. Came down the next day, called His disciples to Him, all of them, there would have been perhaps several hundred of them, and out of those disciples chose twelve of them whom He also named as apostles. He had many learners. He chose twelve to be the preachers, the miracle workers, those who cast out demons, to authenticate the gospel they preached. They were the apostles.

And what we've been doing here is just stopping long enough to get to know them. They are named here, Simon, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. We can't just pass by these names because they're not just names. They are people, not just people, apostles, apostles with a unique calling. In the 9th chapter we'll find out that they are there granted the ability to cast out demons and to do miracles and healings. We know then that they had a very unique ministry of preaching the gospel and authenticating the validity of that gospel by miracles and signs and wonders, as Paul says.

We also know that they will rule over the twelve tribes of Israel in the Millennial Kingdom. And when we get to heaven we will find their names on the twelve foundation stones under the twelve gates that give entrance to the New Jerusalem, the capital city of heaven. They are unique men called by the Lord to carry on the ministry after He was gone, to establish the church in the world, to write the scriptures, and oversee the writings of the scriptures that we call the New Testament, critical men.

The remarkable part about it is that they were so common. None of them was among the religious elite, none of them was among the nobility, the only one apparently who had any money was a tax collector who earned it by graft and corruption. Tax collectors were Jews, as you remember, who bought tax franchises from the Romans, the occupying army hated by the Jews. They were therefore traitors to their own people. They extorted taxes from them by means of intimidation and they were surrounded by criminals, con-men, and thugs who strong-armed the money out of the hands of their people who gave it very reluctantly. They were the most hated and despised of all Jews. Matthew was one of them, perhaps the only one with any money, ill gotten.

None of them were taken from the priests. None of them were taken from the scribes. None of them were taken from the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the religious nobility, the religious elite. None of them that we know of had anything to do with Jerusalem which was the center of religion. The only one who wasn't a Galilean was Judas the traitor who was from Kerioth. And so they were the

commonest of the common men.

Coming from Galilee they would have been looked down upon by the leaders of Israel as the riff-raff, the common folk, the hoi polloi. But it is just like the Lord to choose the common, as Paul said, "Not many noble, not many mighty." He has chosen the base and the common and the weak and the insignificant that in the end all the credit may be His. The only explanation for the church in the world, the only explanation for the power of the gospel through human history is the power of God, not the power of these men.

In the words of the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 4, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels," Paul wrote in verse 7 of that chapter. And what he was saying was, we have this glorious gospel that is the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ, this amazing gospel, and we, Paul being an apostle come lately, have this treasure in earthen vessels, earthen vessels, clay pots. At best, Paul said, we are clay pots. And the apostle Paul, writing to Timothy, said, clay pots are vessels unto dishonor. I told you some weeks ago that in a house they had utensils that were used for honorable things, such as serving food. And there were utensils in a house, vessels in a house used for dishonorable things, such as taking out the refuse of the family. Clay pots were used for that. They were used for the commonest, basest of uses. They were replaceable, they were breakable, they were ugly, they were used for the unspeakable things in the house and Paul says we are, at best, clay pots that the excellency may not be of us but of God.

But God in His marvelous power and wisdom can take a clay pot and fit it for the Master's use, as Paul said in 2 Timothy 2:21. And so we are now going to enter into the fitting stage of these twelve clay pots. One of them ultimately rejected, being Judas, replaced by a man named Matthias, another one added later, the apostle Paul. But the clay pots are here introduced to us and they remind us that God uses common men to do uncommon things. He uses common men who have no eternal capacities, who have no ability to do anything that is forever and transforms them into those who are capable of doing that which is eternal. In our own human flesh all that we do perishes. All that we do is temporal. But when the Lord gets a hold of us, what we do can become eternal.

And so, we're meeting the common men with the uncommon calling. We have already met Peter, the remarkable, unforgettable Peter, the leader, the one in Matthew 10:2 called *prōtos*, the first one, the primary one, the chief one, always the leader, always at the top of the four lists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and Acts have lists of the apostles, always Peter is first. Peter is the spokesman, speaking not just for himself but for the others many times in the gospels; the most verbal of all, the most overt, the most flamboyant, the leader.

We have met his brother who was just the opposite behind the scenes, quiet, Andrew, the missionary who was always bringing people to Jesus, self-effacing, meek, unassuming, non-assertive.

Then we have met James; James, son of thunder, *Boanerges*, bold, ambitious, zealous, passionate. And now we meet John, the brother of James.

He takes our attention. John is familiar to us because of the gospel of John, because of the three epistles of John and because he is the recipient of the apocalypse, the Revelation that ends the New Testament. So we have a lot of information that John has provided for us, revelation would be a better way to term it. He has given us the story of Jesus in his gospel. He has given us three epistles

in which the Holy Spirit inspired him to write important matters to the church. And he has given us the visions of Christ that dominate the apocalypse.

We can know much about John from how he views things in his gospel, much about John from how he views the church in his epistles, and much about John from how he views the revelations that he receives, the visions of Christ. And so John is known to us.

John also was part of the inner circle, Peter, James and John being the most intimate followers of Christ. Andrew was always a part of group one. Every list of the apostles has three groups and the people in the groups are always the same first four, second four, third four. They're always in the same group. They are in decreasing intimacy to Christ. Peter, James, John, Andrew the closest to Christ, the next group a little further away, and the third group, not close to Christ at all. They don't appear in intimate association with Christ, although they were part of the twelve and they were drawn near to Him, it says in Mark, for the purpose of training to be apostles, yet they were a little bit further apart than group two and group one. But the groups are always the same and group one is always Peter, James, John and Andrew.

But of the four, the three were the most intimate, Peter, James and John. And probably John would be the one about whom we know the most next to Peter. And, of course, we have more writing from John than we do Peter, since Peter only wrote two epistles. So John takes up a huge part of the New Testament by his writings, and an important part of the gospels by his presence, and is there with Peter as a companion in the first twelve chapters of Acts.

I say all that to say, last week we talked about Andrew and James and all I could do was give you a silhouette because we don't have much about Andrew, and we don't have much about James. I'm going to try this morning to give you a full color portrait of John.

Now John, we know, is the brother of James. It doesn't say that here, it just says in verse 14, "James and John." But Luke doesn't need to repeat that because back in chapter 5 he made it very clear in verse 10 that James and John were sons of Zebedee, which makes them brothers. And they were partners with Simon. What you have with these four, Peter, James, John and Andrew, are two sets of brother, Peter and Andrew, and James and John who were in the fishing business together. They were partners in a fishing business. They came from the same area. They lived in the same area. They worked together every day. They were close friends and business partners. John is the brother then of James.

Now in order to get a grip on John without going through everything that we could in the New Testament, what I want to do is give you a frame. If you have two things in mind, you have a framework to understand John. And those two things can be summed up in two words that are primary words in Christian revelation and Christian vocabulary. Two things characterize John, truth and love. Just jot those two things down. You may not even need to write them down because by the time I'm through this morning, you won't forget them, truth and love. All the New Testament material on John, everything we could say about John in kind of giving you the picture of John is going to hang on a frame of truth and love. Those two realities, those two spiritual realities that are so critical to the kingdom of God, they are irreplaceable, essential, and actually inseparable from each other, are the characteristics of John. If you want to know how to describe John, you can describe John as a man of truth and a man of love, and that is the most desirable mix possible. If you could want anything, if you could wish for anything in your sanctification, wish for that. If you could pursue

anything, pursue that. Pursue a perfect balance of spiritual mix of truth and love. Know the truth and hold it with love.

Let me see if I can't illustrate that for you with a passage from the apostle Paul in the fourth chapter of Ephesians. Ephesians chapter 4 gives to us a magnificent insight into God's design for the church, both as to its ministry and its goal. The ministry of the church begins because in verses 11 of Ephesians 4 the Lord has given the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, teaching pastors. So the Lord gives gifted men to His church, gifted men that He has redeemed. They are those who have leadership in the church. Their responsibility is, verse 12, the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry. So the Lord gives to the church leaders to equip the saints, equipping the saints with a view of building up the body of Christ. This is edification, this is sanctification. This is the maturing process. This is spiritual growth. And the goal of that, in verse 13, is to attain to the unity of the faith. We're all headed to the same place, we're all headed to one singular place, the faith takes us to one end. It is the knowledge of the Son of God that produces a mature man to the measure of a stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

Without taking all that language apart totally, let me just say, the point is this, the Lord has given to the church teachers, apostles, prophets, evangelists, teaching pastors for the purpose of building up the saints with the goal that their edification or their maturing brings them to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. The goal of sanctification, the goal of all ministry, the goal of the church, the goal of spiritual growth then is Christ-likeness. Everything the Lord is doing in the church through the gifted men, everything His Spirit is working in the process of sanctification, spiritual development is to bring us to a mature man. And maturity is defined as Christ, o make us like Christ so that we are no longer, verse 14, here's the negative side, so we are no longer children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine by the trickery of men, by craftiness and deceitful scheming. Children are vulnerable. They make a good metaphor for spiritually immature people.

The Lord is moving us to a place where we no longer lack discernment, where we no longer lack discretion, or discrimination or wisdom, or understanding. But rather we have moved out of the vulnerability of childhood into the wisdom of maturity. We come to this point of the measure of the stature of fullness of Christ, speaking the truth in love. We are to grow up in all aspects unto Him who is the head, even Christ.

What does it mean to be spiritually mature? It means to speak the truth in love. That's where we're going, folks. We're going in our spiritual progress to a point where we know the truth, but we speak it with love. There is that balance of those two pinnacles of Christian virtue. It may seem easy in terms of articulation, but it takes a lifetime and it takes a constant scrutiny and the constant, mighty work of the Spirit of God and the work of the Word in the life to produce that balance. It means knowing sound doctrine, but it means also bearing the fruit of the Spirit, which is love. It is an elusive balance, this spiritual maturity, but it is Christ-likeness. Christ was the perfect expression of truth and the perfect expression of love. He is the model. This balance belongs to those who know sound doctrine and those who walk in the Spirit and manifest the fruit of the Spirit, which is love.

This balance, by the way, is, as I said, very hard to come by. First of all, there are people in the church, most of them, I would assume, who don't even understand that it is the priority, it is the goal. Everything ultimately should be defined in our lives by the goal. Where are we going? And where we're going is toward Christ-likeness, and what is that? It is coming to the place where we speak the

truth in love, where everything that comes out of our mouths is a right representation of divine revelation spoken in love. That's where we're headed. That was Christ, who spoke the truth and only the truth. He said, "I only speak what the Father shows Me to speak." He never spoke a word that was not an accurate reflection of the mind of God and He spoke in love. No one could question the love of Christ demonstrated not only by His weeping over the very people that God would judge, but demonstrated by His willingness to go to the cross and give up His own life for those He loved. This is the balance.

There are plenty of people today who are heavy on the love side. They are ignorant, very often. They are deceived, the truth is missing. And what they're left with is an error or shallowness often clothed in tolerant sentimentality. That's a poor substitute for genuine love.

On the other hand, there are the orthodox who have all of their theological ducks in a row and who know doctrine, but are unloving and self-exalting. They are left with truth as cold facts, stifling and unattractive.

Manifesting both truth and love is only possible to the mature believer who has grown into the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. And the only way that you can define spiritual maturity is with these two, one who knows the truth and speaks it in love; to know the truth as God has revealed it and to love as Christ loves. And that's the framework that defines John. If you're looking for a mature example, John will do you very well. Christ is the perfection of that. John is the human example of that.

And it seems to me that there is always, as I read history, there is always a struggle in every age of the church for this balance. I was reading just yesterday, in fact I was reading to Patricia a section of a book that I wrote some years ago called *The Love of God*. There's an interesting little section in there on D.L. Moody who was a preacher of hell-fire and damnation only. And somehow there showed up at the church where Moody was in Chicago a little Englishman by the name of Harry, and Moody attests to the fact that Harry preached from John 3:16, "For God so loved the world," and it was the first time Moody had ever understood the love of God. And he was so taken by what this man said that he announced to the people that he was preaching on the same subject every night that week. Bring your friends. It was a new discovery. And so, this little Englishman took the same text every night for a week and Moody at the end of the week said for the first time in his life he understood the love of God.

That could be said for almost every era of the church. It's certainly true today. There's a real struggle to find the balance between these two. There was a time when preachers were just firing out hell-fire and wrath and damnation and they needed a dose of balancing love. It seems as though we live in a day when it's all love, love, love and who cares about the truth? One way or another we could assume the enemy would attack this because this is the objective of true spiritual maturity. Shallow teaching abounds. Tolerance of error abounds. So does cold orthodoxy. Sentiment and superficiality on the one side, and prideful indifference on the other. The critical mix of these two things is visible to us in this beloved apostle John.

Now, let's sort of hang some canvas on that frame and see what kind of portrait we can paint of John. It will be a sort of simple one. I'm not a very good artist and we don't have enough time for delicate nuances. But we'll get a general look at John.

Because of John's treatment of himself, because of the way he refers to himself in his gospel, we tend to think of John, and rightly so, as humble. And he became humble. He was eventually humble. He didn't start out that way. But because he's so self-effacing in his gospel, it is assumed by most people that he was always that way, sort of a meek, mild, wimpish, pale-skinned, ashen, effeminate guy. That's the way he shows up in Medieval art. You know, he appears frequently leaning on Jesus' shoulder looking up with a blank, dove-eyed stare into space, sort of the passive type. Not even close, folks, not even close.

John did become to some degree humble. John did respond to the shaping ministry of Jesus in his life and learn to love. But he didn't start out that way. He started out, along with his brother James, as a son of thunder. In Mark 3:17 it was Jesus who called them both *Boanerges*, sons of thunder. John was volatile. John was brash. John was aggressive. John was passionate. John was zealous. John was personally ambitious.

When James was calling down fire from heaven to burn up the Samaritans, John was echoing. It was James and John. There was Andrew, you know, who was quietly bringing people to Jesus and it was James and John who was telling God to burn up all the unbelievers.

And when the mother, the wife of Zebedee, came to Jesus and said, "I want my boys on the right and the left hand," it wasn't just James there, it was John. John was driven. John was ambitious. John wanted prominence. Believe me John was in the middle of all the arguments among the apostles about who was going to be the greatest in the kingdom. So don't assume that when it says "James and John," even though James is named first and may have been the stronger of the two and may have been the older of the two, still John was *Boanerges* just as well.

Interestingly enough, if you study Matthew, Mark and Luke you always see John with Jesus, with Peter, with James. Only one time, isn't that interesting, in three gospels, only one time does John appear and speak alone. And so if we want to know what he's like, that's a good place to go. So turn in your Bible to Mark chapter 9. Here we get John without James, John without Peter, this is pure John. This is the only singular glimpse of John in the synoptic. The first three gospels are called the synoptics because they give a synopsis of the life of Christ, whereas John deals more with His deity being expressed through a series of miracles and self-proclaimed statements of His own identity.

But in Mark 9 we get this one picture of John. The rest of the things about John we have to construct from his gospel and from his epistles and the book of Revelation, but here is historical narrative on John. Now let's go to the beginning of Mark 9 so we get the picture. Jesus makes this incredible statement that some of you are standing here will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it is come with power. This is an amazing statement. Some of you people here aren't going to die until you see kingdom power.

Well the Millennial Kingdom hasn't come yet, what's He talking about? He was talking about previews of coming attractions is what He was talking about. He was talking about, as the hymn writer put it, "A foretaste of glory divine," which happened immediately after that, six days later, verse 2. Six days after Jesus said some of you are going to see the glory of the Kingdom before you die, Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John, the inner circle who were often with Him, apart from Andrew, brought them to a high mountain by themselves and He was transfigured before them.

What happened there, we remember, is He pulled back the veil of His human flesh and the Shekinah glory, the very essence of the nature of the eternal God, was shining out in blazing brilliance. The record of Matthew 17 is that it was so shocking that the disciples were literally terrified into a coma. They fell over like dead people. This is something they had never experienced. This was a transcendental experience, the likes of which they had never even imagined. The garments of the Savior became radiant, exceedingly white as no launderer on earth could whiten them. There isn't any product that can get them as white as they were white. It's a *leukon*, blazing, shining, glowing white, like light. And then Elijah showed up and then Moses showed up in some kind of glorified manifestation.

And they became terrified, verse 6 says, terrifying experience. A cloud formed overshadowing them, a voice, the voice of the Father, "This is My beloved Son, listen to Him." And all at once they looked around and saw no one with Him anymore except Jesus alone. This is an incredible thing Peter, James and John to experience, unique privilege.

Then to make things worse, verse 9, "As they were coming down from the mountain He gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man should rise from the dead." That's hard to do. I mean, you've just seen the most incredible thing that could ever be seen by anybody and you can't tell anybody about it. This is a great restraint to put upon them.

And remember, the disciples were always arguing about who was going to be the greatest. And I'm sure it was very, very difficult for them not to use this as ammunition for their own case. Come down the mountain and say to the rest of the disciples, "Guys, we have the inside track. Where were you when we were up there in the mountain and guess who showed up? Elijah and Moses." And they heard Him talk about rising from the dead and they seized on that statement in verse 10 and began to talk about that.

Lots to talk about: Talk about Moses, talk about Elijah, talk about the glory of God shining through the veil of Jesus' flesh, talk about resurrection. Wow, they had a glimpse of the Kingdom. They must have been excited. They saw things that never could be seen or known by anybody and this is what's going to happen. This is where we're headed, guys, this is some foretaste of the glory to come.

Go a little further in the chapter down to verse 33. They came to Capernaum. "And when He was in the house he began to question them, "What were you discussing on the way?" It wasn't that He needed the information, He just needed the confession. He knew exactly what they were talking about. Verse 34: "They kept silent." Why? They were embarrassed. Why were they embarrassed? "Because on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest."

I can imagine Peter and John saying, "Well, when Jesus was transfigured, I was closer to Him than you were. I looked around. You were two feet to the right and two feet..." This is their ambition. I mean, they were in this thing to go as far as they could go, as high as they could go. And the Lord had to do a lot of work with that ambition. They were so embarrassed they didn't even say anything, shamed.

And sitting down He called the twelve and said to them, you've got to learn something, fellas, "if

anyone wants to be first he shall be (what?) last and servant of all." You've got this thing backwards. You want to be first in the kingdom? Then be a servant. Taking a child, he set him before them, taking him in His arms He said, "Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me, and whoever receives Me doesn't receive Me but Him who sent Me." Don't you get the picture? Instead of arguing and fighting with each other, instead of putting each other down, instead of rejecting each other, why don't you learn that receiving each other as a child is what I require because when you receive one another you receive Me because I live in that person. Instead of fighting each other, instead of conflict with each other, you need to embrace each other as if I were coming to you. And instead of desiring to be first, you need to take the role of last.

And this cut to the heart. This was a serious rebuke. Particularly John got the message and here we have the only time John speaks in these three opening gospels. Verse 38, "John said to Him," and now we get insight into John. I think John spoke because he was convicted. I think he felt the sting of this rebuke. It was really getting old with the Lord, this ambition. And John said, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name and we tried to hinder him because he was not following us." This is sectarianism. He didn't belong to our group. This is the intolerance of John. This is the son of thunder. This is *Boanerges*. This is that sectarianism, that narrowness, that ambition, that desire to have it all for you and not share it with anybody else, especially somebody outside the group. This is John.

But something's changing in John because now John begins to see that as something undesirable, and this is the confession. John is saying in response to what Jesus said, "Teacher, we saw this guy casting out demons in Your name and we tried to stop him." That was John. That was the old John. Stop, you're not in our group. John was not passive. He's aggressive. He was competitive. He was condemning a man who was trying to minister in the name of Jesus. It doesn't tell us anything about the nature of that ministry, but at least he was trying to cast out demons in the name of Jesus and they had shut him down. And John is saying, "I confess, we did that." Because he now is beginning to feel that that's wrong because of what Jesus had just said. Jesus is confronting them and saying, you've got to get rid of this sectarian narrow spirit. And John is the one who verbalizes that I had that and I exhibited that and I did that, but the fact that he's making the confession is indicative of the transformation. His conscience is bothering him. He's being tenderized. He's always been strong for the truth, he's always been zealous and passionate, but the Lord has been teaching him love. And here we see John the past and John in the present beginning to change.

So John, the one time he speaks, confesses his narrowness, confesses his sectarianism, confesses his prejudice. And you say, "Why would a man be chosen like this to be an apostle, passionate, zealous, bombastic, volatile, explosive person like John or James or Peter? Why would the Lord choose a man like that?" Because that redeemed and shaped is useful to God, that kind of courage and strength belongs to the history of the Christian church, doesn't it? The movers and the shakers, the people who literally are the fulcrums that literally turn the earth. You go back and it's the strength of those men, it's the indefatigability of them, it's the relentlessness of them, it's the courage of them, it's the boldness of them that have really written the history of the church. And, of course, they've sealed it with their blood, uncompromising to the very death.

The Lord needs men of great courage, great ambition, great drive, great passion, great zeal, great boldness. And John had that potential for being the kind of man the Lord needed. He had the potential to be the blend of truth and love that God wanted. And I think in Mark 9 you begin to see a critical rebuke that starts to move John toward being a man of love. His strength was shaped by the

Lord into a narrow, uncompromising, intolerant devotion to divine truth. And you see that in his writings.

John, of all the writers of the New Testament, in fact all the writers in the Bible really, is the most black and white. He is the most absolute. He is the one who speaks in certainties. There doesn't seem to be any gray area in John. I like to think that John is black and white without exceptions and Paul is the minister to the exceptions; so when you're reading John, you're reading through the gospel of John, you're reading through the epistles of John, you have to go to Paul every once in a while just to find some breathing space, because everything is so cut and dried with John. You read his gospel and you're either in the light or the darkness. It's either life or death, kingdom of God, kingdom of the devil, children of God, children of Satan. It's the judgment of the righteous or the judgment of the wicked. It's the resurrection of life or the resurrection of damnation. It's receiving Christ or rejecting Christ. It's fruit or no fruit. It's being cut off and burned, or bearing fruit to God's glory. It's obedience or disobedience. It's loving or not loving. It's absolute all the way down the line.

You come into his epistles. You read 1 John and he says, if you're a believer, then you're in the light and you're confessing your sins and you're walking the way Jesus walked and you're loving your brother and you're obeying the commandments and you're not loving the world and you're not continuing in sin and you're ministering to your brother when you see him in need and you're keeping the commandments and you're living righteously and you're pure and you're loving the truth, and on and on and on and on. And you're reading on and you're saying...yeah but not all the time, John, but not all the time. And he never gives you any window. You have to go to Paul for a little space there.

You read his second epistle and he calls for complete, total separation from all that is false. You read his third epistle and it ends in verse 11, "The one who does good is of God, the one who does evil hasn't seen God," just that black and white. If you do good, you're of God, you don't, you're not. That's John. That was his personality. He was the black and white, absolute, certain man. He spoke the truth unwavering without exceptions. But I have to say that he did so with a warm personal pastoral tone. The Lord had taken that tendency toward conviction and narrowness and an uncompromising attitude and He had tied it to the truth so that John relentlessly adheres to the absolute truth of God.

Somewhere along the line, his ambition that makes a man courageous and confident and bold and zealous and passionate was mellowed. And you never find in any of his writings the slightest hint of pride, the slightest hint of self-aggrandizement, self-exaltation, or ambition. And the best, I think the best insight into that is that in his entire gospel, twenty-one chapters, John's gospel, he never once uses his name, never. He would have every reason to do so had he chosen, he never does.

Well, you say, "Does he refer to himself?" Yes, but he always refers to himself in reference to the Lord. Let me show you quickly John 13:23 and this is very helpful in understanding John. John 13:23, it says the upper room, Jesus has just washed the disciples' feet, it's the night that Judas betrays Him, headed to the cross. The disciples are there with Jesus. Jesus says in verse 21, "One of you will betray Me," verse 22, "The disciples look at each other," they're lost to know what...who He's speaking about, they have no idea that it's Judas. And then verse 23, "There was one leaning on Jesus' chest," and they were reclining, of course, in that posture of the long banqueting that they did so that he was very close to Jesus, not maybe literally touching Him but leaning in the direction of where Jesus was. Leaning there, and it says, "He was leaning..." Who was he? "One of His disciples, whom Jesus loved." Boy, is this ever an insight into John.

He never gives his own name. He never speaks of himself in reference to himself. He speaks of himself in reference to Jesus. He's always honoring Christ. Rather than say "John" which might bring some attention to him, he says "the disciple whom Jesus loves," giving glory to Jesus for having loved this man. Now according to John 13:1 and 2 it says, Jesus loved all His apostles. It says, "They were gathered together, having loved them, He loved them unto perfection." He loved them all but it seems to me that there was a unique way in which John gripped this.

Listen to what I say to you. Since John was going to be so critical in articulating the truth, the truth of the gospel of John, the life of Christ, the truth of the epistles of John, life in the church, the truth of the book of Revelation, the consummation of the ages, since John was so critical to the truth, it was essential that it be balanced with love. And so the Lord, I think, took on John as a special project and taught him how to love. How do you teach a man how to love? By loving him the way You want him to love. You learn to love by being loved. And so John got it, he gripped it. He was not the man whom Jesus had called (that would have been nice), not the man whom Jesus had chosen, not the man whom Jesus had taught, but the man whom Jesus had loved. And I think Jesus was doing through the whole of His years with John was loving him and loving him and loving him, and he got it.

In chapter 19 and verse 26, they're standing at the foot of the cross, John is there and the mother of Jesus, Mary, is there along with some other women. In verse 26, "When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved," here's John again referring to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved. I think the thing that just overwhelmed John was that Jesus loved him so much, that He demonstrated such affection and such love and such care and compassion and grace and mercy and tenderness to him that He was teaching John to love and John was getting it.

And then to show you that by the time of the death of Christ, which is about two years after the Luke passage, two years of training between when they were identified and when Jesus died, John has learned love so well that he said Jesus said from the cross to His mother, "Woman, behold your son," and He was referring to John. Woman, behold your son, I'm your son and I'm leaving, I'm giving you a new son to care for you. And He said to that disciple, the one whom He loved, "Behold, your mother. And from that hour the disciple," again he doesn't refer to himself by name, "the disciple whom Jesus loved took her into his own household."

Had John learned to love? I promise you he had or Jesus wouldn't have given him the care of His own mother. He told Peter, "Feed My sheep." He told John, "Care for My mother." There are records in the ecclesiastical history that indicate that John never left Jerusalem and never left the care of Mary until she died. He had become a lover because he was loved in a unique way.

In the 20th chapter verse 2, Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb, ran, came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved. In 21 verse 7: "That disciple therefore whom Jesus loved." Verse 20: "Peter turning around saw the disciple whom Jesus loved." That's how he refers to himself. And I think it was simply John getting the message that was being delivered to him, John, it's great to hold the truth, it's great to be uncompromising and unwavering and narrow and relentless and intolerant of that which is untrue, but, John, you need to balance that with love.

I know, I look at my own life coming out of seminary, you're just loaded to the gills with truth and you're real short on patience. And you want to come blasting into the church. I see it with young men

even today, you want to come blasting into the church and dump the truth on everybody and get immediate response. And you have to learn patience, tolerance, and mercy, and grace and forgiveness and tenderness, and compassion. And that's where John was. It's great to find the boldness, it's great to find the thunder, but he needed to love.

And he was amazed, I think, that Jesus loved a man who wanted to burn up the Samaritans, that He loved a man who sought honor for himself in the kingdom. So when you look at the life of John, you see these things, truth and love. The truth, it just comes through everything he says. His gospel is a theology, it's a Christology. It's the theology of Christ and the gospel. It's consummate divine truth. His epistles are an affirmation of the theology of true salvation. And, of course, his book, the Revelation, is the ultimate Christology. It's the presentation of the eternal glory of the Son of God. He was the consummate theologian and his theology focused primarily on Christ in all His glory as God, as Man, as Redeemer and coming King. He had the truth, but he also had love.

He uses the word "love" over eighty times in his writings, over eighty times. That's why he's become known as the apostle of love. He learned to love because the Lord loved him and he got that message. He learned to love the way the Lord loved him. And in his writings you can sum up his theology. He taught that God is a God of love, that God loved His own Son, that God loved the disciples, that God loves all men, that God is loved by Christ, that Christ loved the disciples, that Christ loves individuals, that Christ expects men to love Him, that Christ taught that we should love one another and that love fulfills the law. Love was a critical part of John's teaching. It's one of the dominant themes. And his love never slid into tolerant sentimentality, masquerading as love. To the very end of his life he was still a son of thunder. To the very end of his life he lost none of his intolerance for lies. It was near the end of his life, in the 90s, from 90 to 95 of the first century... He died in 98 or so. He wrote the Revelation in 96. It was in the 90s when he was writing his epistles that he was still thundering out the truth, thundering out the truth. Thundered against errant Christologies; he thundered against lies and deceptions and he thundered against sin and he thundered against immorality. He was a son of thunder to the end.

You see, this is an important note. The Lord knew that the most powerful advocate of love would have to be a man who never compromised the truth. Otherwise his love would take him down the road of sentimentality and tolerance of error, a road traveled by very many who claim Christ. There was love, but there was never equivocation on the truth.

He uses the word "witness" sixty-eight, seventy times. It's another dominant word because he was always the witness to the truth. He referred to the witness of John the Baptist, the witness of Scripture, the witness of the Father, the witness of Christ, the witness of the miracles, the witness of the Holy Spirit and the witness of the apostles, all witnessing to the truth. A lover of truth and a lover of God and a lover of men, he did not lean on Jesus' shoulder because of some maudlin affection, but because he wanted to hear every word of truth that came out of the mouth of Christ and because he wanted to enjoy the pure love his Lord gave him.

Many tributes have been made to John's teaching, as to its truth and love. And they are justified. In the first chapters of Acts, John added his love and his proclamation of the truth to Peter's in the founding of the church. Many, many years later, the end of the first century, when all the other apostles were dead, he was still building Gentile churches on truth and love. He was the fiery lover of the truth and lover of God and lover of men. He hated what the Lord hated, but he loved whom the Lord loved.

Seventy years of this, he had become the patriarch of the churches in Asia Minor, modern Turkey. He was banished, Revelation 1:9 says, "For the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus." His speaking the truth in love was more than the culture could bear, and so they banished him to a small island five miles by ten miles called Patmos.

It's in the Aegean Sea off the west coast of Turkey. I've been there. And he was on that rock in exile because he wouldn't give up the truth and he preached it out of love for God and love for men. Two years after he received the Revelation, around 96 A.D., in the year 98 A.D. during the reign of Emperor Trajan, he died, tradition says. And some traditions say he was most remembered because of a constant phrase on his lips, "My little children, love one another." And those who knew him remembered him by greeting one another, "My little children, love one another."

But the best epitaph that I can give you... Go with me to 2 John and we'll close with this. In 2 John we see the life of John in a little microcosm, the things that concerned him, truth and love manifest. Pick it up in verse 4. He's writing to this church, verse 4, "I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth." That's John, always concerned about the truth. "I was glad to find some of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment to do from the Father."

Boy, that's the way it went, from the Father down through us to you came the truth. And you're walking in it. And now I ask you, "Lady," referring to the church, "not as writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another." I'm telling you, folks, I'm so glad you have the truth, but you can't have the truth without what? Love. I'm telling you, love one another.

What kind of love are we talking about? "This is love; that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it."

I'm telling you, it's the love of obedience. You love God; then be obedient. You love Christ; then be obedient to His Word. Love God, love Christ and in obedience to His Word love one another. I'm glad you have the truth, but you can't have the truth without love and love means you obey the Word of God and that's how you love God and that's how you love Christ. And that motivates you to love others. Be very, very aware, verse 7, "Many deceivers have gone out into the world." Now he goes back to the truth. Don't let that love descend into sentimentality. There are deceivers all over the place. They don't acknowledge Jesus Christ coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and the Antichrist. Watch yourselves that you might not lose what we've accomplished so you receive a full reward. You start tampering with people who teach lies about Christ, you start tampering around fellowshiping and associating and getting involved in mutual enterprises with people who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ, I'm telling you, you will lose your reward. "Anyone who goes too far and doesn't abide in the teaching of Christ, the true New Testament doctrine of Christ, doesn't have God. The one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, do not give him a greeting, for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds."

Summation: I'm so glad you walk in the truth. You can't walk in the truth apart from love. You've got to love God, love Christ by obeying Their Word. And you need to be obedient and love one another and don't let that love sink to a tolerance of error. Don't turn it into sentimentality. That's a summary

of John, right there.

Scott Daniel McClain said of John, "He died like a summer's day, his heart expanding like the setting sun." No man or woman is off Christ's team because of what they are, only because of what they refuse to become. So encouraging.

The fishermen of Galilee, Peter, Andrew, James and John, became fishers of men on a tremendous scale, gathering souls into the church, founding the church. In a sense, they're still casting their nets into the sea of the world by the testimony of Jesus in the gospels and their epistles. They're still bringing multitudes of people to Christ. And we see that Christ took very common men, made them into very uncommon apostles, seeks to do a similar work in your life. What a privilege.

Father, we thank You for the testimony of John whose life we have so briefly considered. This man who was the perfect balance of truth and love, who was a spiritual father to his children, shows us what spiritual fathers should be like even now. We thank You that he lived to be an old man, his love flourished and grew, and so did his devotion to the truth. Make us people of the truth who speak the truth in love that the truth may be attractive to those who desperately need to hear it. In the Savior's name we pray. Amen.

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