

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

The Beloved Disciple The Gospel of John

This weekend we are beginning our study of the fourth gospel. I would hope and pray that our study of this wonderful gospel will allow us to see Jesus more clearly and cause us to pursue Him more passionately. I would like to start by making sure we are familiar with the author. But why is this so important? Let me tell you a story.

Martin and Gracia Burnham were missionaries in the Philippines. They were kidnapped by a Muslim militant group known as the Abu Sayyaf and held for ransom. Mission authorities refused to pay the ransom and this refusal ultimately culminated in a military raid. In the raid Gracia was freed but Martin unfortunately was killed

This incident has led to a discussion among mission organizations about the appropriateness of mission organizations or the government paying ransoms in order to secure the release of missionaries

Let me read to you one man's opinion, "If a man goes out as a missionary, he has no business to venture to wild lands, with the expectation that somehow the government will protect him as well as if he had stayed at home. If he is fit for his work, he has no more right to complain of what may befall him than a soldier has in getting shot. But it is impossible to adopt this standard for women."

This is one's man opinion. And you might quickly dismiss it. But I believe it will take on much greater significance if you know who made this particular statement. It was Theodore Roosevelt who actually supported the use of government funds to secure the release of another missionary couple over 100 years ago.

Obviously he thought that using government money to ransom male missionaries was unacceptable but using government money to ransom female missionaries was a totally different matter.

You may or may not agree with his statement. But whether you agree or disagree with this statement, is not the reason why I read it. I read it to illustrate the importance of knowing the source of the words that we hear or read. Knowing the source of the words can make those words come alive and give them greater significance.

If this is true, in the case of a hostage crisis that occurred over 100 years ago, how much more true would it be when it comes to reporting the life and ministry of Christ that occurred over 2000 years ago. It is not so much what is said about Christ but who said it.

And in the case of the fourth gospel conservative Bible scholars unanimously believe it was written by the Apostle John. And if we can be convinced that this is true and understand the special relationship that he had with Christ then I believe it will fuel our appetite to consider the many truths about Christ contained in this fourth gospel.

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Why do conservative Bible scholars think that John wrote the fourth gospel? It is not because John introduced the gospel with his name. It is not because he concluded the gospel with his name. It is not because we can find his name anywhere in the gospel. In fact he never identifies himself by name. Conservative Bible scholars obviously are looking at something else to point them to the apostle John as the author of the fourth gospel. But what are they looking at?

First of all they are looking at history. History records for us that Polycarp, the disciple of the Apostle John, told Irenaeus that John wrote the fourth gospel while living in Ephesus. This testimony was readily accepted by the early church as true and only recently has modern liberal Bible scholars challenged John's authorship. So another question must be asked, "Can the traditional view of John's authorship be confirmed in some way other than by the testimony of history? And the answer to that question is yes. Not only have conservative Bible scholars looked at history but they have also looked at internal evidence.

Polycarp's historical written statement that John wrote the fourth gospel is confirmed by internal evidence (John 21:15-24). By internal evidence I mean pertinent material contained in the gospel itself. What is that internal evidence?

Though the gospel does not give us the author's name the gospel does identify him as the disciple whom Jesus loved in **John 21:15-24**.

In this passage Jesus had just instructed Peter about the kind of death that he, that is Peter, would ultimately experience, which was crucifixion. Now how would you think Peter would respond to what Jesus said? We don't have to guess.

Peter seeing the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, according to **John 21:20**, turned to Jesus and asked, "What about this man?" In other words "Is he, like me, going to die before you return?" Jesus responds to Peter, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!

You might say this is all very interesting but what does this have to do with the question, "Who wrote the Gospel of John?" Let's continue to read.

After a very brief aside in **John 21:23** we then come to **John 21:24** which actually identifies the author of this epistle. And who exactly is it? Listen to this verse, "**This is the disciple (the disciple whom Jesus loved who was following behind Jesus and Peter) who bears witness of these things, and wrote these things.**" The disciple that Jesus loved is the author of the fourth gospel (John 21:24).

On every occasion throughout the gospel when the author chooses to refer himself, he uses this descriptive phrase rather than his name. Though this information is helpful in identifying the author of the gospel we still do not know his name. What other internal evidence will further help us in identifying the author of this gospel?

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The author who chooses to refer to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved obviously was very close to Christ. In fact the author, who chooses to refer to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved, was a member of Christ's inner circle (John 13:22-25). The very strategic relationship that this disciple, the disciple whom Jesus loved enjoyed was very prominently displayed at the Last Supper.

Let me read for you a portion of what took place at the last supper from **John 13**. After Jesus had washed the disciples feet he revealed that one of them would shortly betray Him.

And then in **John 13:22-24** it says, **“The disciples began looking at one another, at a loss to know of which one He was speaking. (23) There was reclining on Jesus breast one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. (24) Simon Peter therefore gestured to him, and said to him, “Tell us who it is of whom He is speaking.” (25) He, leaning back thus on Jesus’ breast, said to Him, “Lord, who is it?”** Considering the posture and position of the disciple that Jesus loved, as well as Peter’s request, we have to conclude that the disciple that Jesus loved enjoyed a very strategic position amongst Christ’s disciples and would have been a part of His inner circle.

Who among the 12 disciples might fit this description? Only Peter, James and John could be considered members of Christ’s inner circle (Mark 5:37; Mark 14:33; Matthew 17:1).

They alone were given the privilege of going with Him when he raised the daughter of Jairus in **Mark 5:37**. They alone were the ones permitted to witness the transfiguration in **Matthew 17:1**. They alone were invited to join him in prayer in the garden of Gethemane in **Mark 14:33**. Whenever we see Christ interacting with His disciples invariably these three are highlighted or very close at hand.

But which one of these three would it be? We can immediately eliminate Peter since he is consistently distinguished from the disciple who Jesus loved by the author of this forth gospel. We saw this in **John 21:20-24** when Peter turned around and saw the disciple that Jesus loved. And we have saw it again in **John 13:20-25** when Peter asked the disciple who Jesus loved to find out from Jesus which disciple was going to betray Him.

This leaves the two brothers James and John but which one is it? Since James was martyred in between 40-44 AD and the gospel was written in approximately 90 AD the author had to be John.

We now know who wrote the fourth gospel but we will not really know John until we understand why he chose to describe himself as the disciple that Jesus loved. This is the question that I would like us to examine this weekend. Why did John choose to describe himself as the disciple that Jesus loved?

John did not describe himself as the disciple that Jesus loved in order to imply that Jesus loved him more than He loved the other disciples (John 14:21; 15:9-10). Jesus loved all His disciples. John himself made this point throughout the Gospel of John. What truth did John record for us from the lips of Jesus in **John 14:21**? **“He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him.”** Was this promise to only one disciple or a select few disciples? No! This promise was to every disciple.

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And again what did John record for us from the lips of Jesus in **John 15:9-10**, “**Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you, abide in My love. (10) If you keep my commandments, you will abide in My love just as I have kept My Father’s commandments, and abide in His love.**” Was this promise made only to one disciple or to a select few disciples? No! It was made to every disciple.

If you are here this weekend and you are as a way of life seeking to keep the commandments of Christ you can know that you are abiding in the love of Christ. Christ loves you no more or less than any other disciple who is keeping His commandments as a way of life. When John describes himself as the disciple that Jesus loved he is not making that statement from the perspective of Christ but rather from his own perspective. His statement is based on his personal feelings.

I have a brother and sister and when we were small my grandmother would take each one of individually over to her house. And when we were there she focused all of her attention on us and what we wanted. How did this make us feel? It made us feel as if we were special to her. It made us feel as if we were the grandson or granddaughter that grandmother loved. Does this sound familiar.

When John referred to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved he was not in any way seeking to exalt himself over the other disciples. He is simply communicating to us the special relationship that he personally felt he enjoyed with Christ.

Though John was not attempting to exalt himself over others he certainly wanted everyone to know that he personally felt that Christ’s love for him was special. This is evident by the number of times throughout his gospel that he referred to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved.

Does every disciple who keeps the commands of Christ bask in the love of Christ in the same way as John? Many do but certainly not all.

Why is this? Why would some who are seeking to be obedient to the commands of Christ feel closer to Christ than others? Because their interest in pursuing obedience as a disciple of Christ is shortsighted and immature. For many Christians a life of obedience is pursued for the wrong reasons.

Some pursue obedience because they believe that by pursuing obedience that their earthly lives will be somehow enhanced and that is their motivation.

For others their pursuit of obedience is an end in itself. They simply see obedience as their duty and they go about each day checking off boxes.

But both of these reasons are shortsighted and immature. And it certainly is not the reason that John gives us in his gospel for pursuing obedience.

Let us go back and consider a few verses we have already highlighted in John’s gospel. What does **John 14:21** say? “**He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him.**” Keeping Christ’s commands is all about maintaining and deepening our relationship with Christ.

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We saw the same thing in **John 15:9-10** “**Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you, abide in My love. (10) If you keep my commandments, you will abide in My love just as I have kept My Father’s commandments, and abide in His love.**” Obedience is all about maintaining and pursuing a relationship with Christ.

Everything that John did in his life was all about maintaining and deepening his relationship with Jesus. I believe that this will be obvious throughout our study of this gospel. Keeping the commandments of Christ must not be seen as the end but as the means to the end. Keeping the commandments of Christ is all about maintaining and nurturing a relationship with Him.

Certainly Paul would agree with this. What did Paul say in **Philippians 3:10**, “**That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings.**” Just like John everything in Paul’s life was about maintaining and deepening his relationship with Christ. Christians who purpose to maintain and deepen their relationship with Christ through obedience are the Christians who will feel most loved by Christ. Christians who purpose to maintain and deepen their relationship with Christ through obedience are the Christians who will feel as if they are basking in the love of Christ. The apostle John was one of those disciples and he wanted everyone to know this.

But in John’s desire to proclaim the special relationship that he felt he had with Christ it was not about John it was all about Christ. John was not overwhelmed by how lovable he was but rather how loving Christ was.

John was not seeking to exalt himself in the way he identified himself but rather he was seeking to exalt the love of Christ.

John identifying himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved was not a mark of arrogance but rather of brokenness. It is precisely why Christians still sing in the first person singular “**Loved with everlasting love, Led by grace that love to know, Spirit, breathing from above, Thou hast taught me it is so! O This full and perfect peace! O this transport all divine! In a love which cannot cease, I am his and he is mine.**”

CONCLUSION

Hopefully knowing who wrote the words of this fourth gospel will help the words of this gospel to come alive for us. Hopefully knowing who wrote the words of this fourth gospel will help the words of this gospel to become even more meaningful to us.

And who wrote the fourth gospel? It was not some ordinary spiritually minded individual but rather someone who knew Christ extremely well. The Apostle John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, a member of Christ’s inner circle, wrote the fourth gospel.