



Watchman prayer alert

On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed a watchman...
—Isaiah 62:6

First Bradenton

Volume 15, Issue 10 • October 2019

Identity Defines Outcome

The windless sky was growing ominously dark as the clouds grew thick overhead. The stillness of the air was unnerving. Even the mob of mockers had grown silent.

Jesus, beaten, bruised and broken, hung suspended between Heaven and earth, nailed to a rugged cross. He fought for each breath. He tensed His muscles to pull Himself up enough to suck in a shallow breath, tearing the flesh a little more each time where the nails penetrated His hands and feet. This made speaking difficult. Each word he uttered was chosen carefully.

His comforters at the foot of the cross were few. Of course His grieving mother would never leave His side. Her sister was there, too, along with Mary (wife of Cleopas) and Mary of Magdelene from whom He had cast out demons. The only disciple we know of who made it to the crucifixion was John, the youngest.

John recounts the story in his own words, *"When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' From that hour the disciple took her into his own household."* (John 19:26-27)

Beloved Disciple

While there is much we can extract from these two verses, let's focus this time on John's self-identification. John labels himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." No other gospel writer refers to this disciple as John the Beloved. Only John.

Five times in his gospel, John referred to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved.

- John 13:23 - At the Last Supper
- John 19:26 - At the foot of the cross
- John 20:2 - When Mary found the disciples after Jesus' resurrection
- John 21:7 - When they were fishing and John identified Jesus as the risen Christ on the beach.
- John 21:20 - When Peter was in conversation with Jesus alone and John followed them.

Did you notice that the very first time he identified himself as the beloved was just hours before the crucifixion? This was the lens through which John viewed his world. Everything he did, how he reacted to events, the words he spoke and the actions he took emanated directly from his

understanding of who he is in Christ. He is loved by Jesus. He is the disciple Jesus loved. He sees himself as the beloved.

You are Beloved

Was John the only disciple Jesus loved? Was He Jesus' favorite? According to John himself, Jesus loved all His disciples. *"Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, **having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.**"* (John 13:1)

John's personal identity was wrapped up in the fact that Jesus loved him. John knew that Jesus loved the others too, but his relationship with Jesus was intimate and personal. John wanted you and me to experience this understanding of God also. In his epistles, John gave instructions to the beloved ten times. He identified them as beloved.

- 1 John 2:7 - *Beloved*, I am not writing a new commandment to you...
- 1 John 3:2 - *Beloved*, now we are children of God...
- 1 John 3:21 - *Beloved*, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God.
- 1 John 4:1 - *Beloved*, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits ...
- 1 John 4:7 - *Beloved*, let us love one another, for love is from God.
- 1 John 4:11 - *Beloved*, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another
- 3 John 1:1 - The elder to the *beloved* Gaius.
- 3 John 1:2 - *Beloved*, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers.
- 3 John 1:5 - *Beloved*, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially when they are strangers...
- 3 John 1:11 - *Beloved*, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good.

I have always pictured an elderly John talking to

his readers as his children whom he dearly loved. I am sure that is true. However, I believe his term here goes much deeper. John was reminding his readers (and us) that we are the beloved of God almighty. We are the beloved of Jesus Himself. Jesus died from me, because He loved me!

But I Love God

If we also understood the depths of the love of God for us personally, it would have to color our world. It would change our perception of ourselves, and it would change how we relate with other people.

Whether it was intentional or not on John's part, he presents a clear juxtaposition on this topic in his gospel at the Last Supper. Two main characters in the drama that night were Peter and John. After washing the disciple's feet, Jesus took His place at the table. During dinner He spoke of His coming betrayal. Peter signaled to John who was leaning on Jesus and instructed John to ask who would betray Jesus. Why could Peter not have asked Jesus? Why did he want John to ask? Was it simply because John was closer? They had all walked with Jesus for three years. They were in a small room eating together as friends. Surely Peter could have been heard and voiced his own question. Perhaps he recognized that John had a special connection with Jesus. Perhaps Peter knew that John identified as being loved by Jesus.

In the midst of His last instructions to the 12 as Jesus tried to prepare them, Jesus said, "I am with you a little while longer... Where I am going, you cannot come." Instantly Peter declared his undying love. *"Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You."* (John 13:37)

Right there Peter reveals the lens through which he looks. He identified himself as a man who loved Jesus. He believed he was ready to die for Jesus. This same Peter was the one who didn't want Jesus to wash his feet, because that would be contrary to his view of the Messiah. He did relent and asked for more. It is the same Peter who whipped out a sword in the Garden of Gethsemane and sliced off the ear from a servant

in order to defend Jesus. In his mind, Peter was willing to go to battle, and die if need be, for the Savior he loved. It rocked his world when he saw Jesus lead away in the custody of the angry mob. He couldn't bear the mockery of the trial. At his weakest moment he denied even knowing Jesus three times.

Both Peter and John were in the courtyard of the high priest, close enough to witness the scandalous trial that was taking place in the dead of night. Would the outcome have been different if they had both stood in defense of Jesus? We cannot know. Both were silent that night.

They all heard the cock crow when Peter vehemently denied Jesus the third time. Peter remembered Jesus' warning and in complete confusion he ran out of the courtyard looking for a solitary place to mourn.

As the plan of God unfolded, Jesus was convicted and marched off to stand before Pilate. He was sentenced to death on the cross.

At the Cross

When Jesus drew His final breath as a man on earth, it was not the disciple that loved Jesus who stood at the foot of the cross. Rather, it was the disciple Jesus loved.

In the words of the elder John, *"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that **He loved us** and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."* (1 John 4:10)

John's young life was wrapped up in the intimate knowledge that he was unconditionally loved by Jesus, despite his impetuous nature and all his shortcomings. This understanding defined John and gave him the fortitude to walk with Jesus through the darkest hour. It also colored all of John's later writing to the church.

Follow Me

After His resurrection, Jesus sought out Peter. In a little chat, Jesus asked Peter three times, "Do you

love Me?" Three times, Peter replied, "Lord, you know that I love you."

Isn't it interesting that throughout the final days of Jesus' life Peter identified as a disciple who loved Jesus and that is the same question Jesus asked him? Jesus' query was "Do you love Me?" Every time Peter's answer was the same. He said, "You know I love You." Perhaps the best answer to the question is, "Lord, I know You love me."

Our Identity

How do you identify yourself? Are you a Christian who loves Jesus or a Christian who Jesus loves? Are you trying to do great things for God to prove you love Him? Are you like Lazarus' sister Martha who invited Jesus into her home and worked tirelessly to plan all the details for Jesus and serve Him? Martha loved Jesus very much. Or, are you like Martha's sister Mary who sat at Jesus' feet in their living room just to hear His voice? Mary knew she was loved by Jesus.

Don't misunderstand. Of course we Christians love Jesus. But we must always remember, *we love Him because He first loved us.* (1 John 4:19)

Before we can truly love God or other people, we must fully understand in our hearts (not just our heads) the vast love that He has for us. When we fully understand how much God loves us individually and personally, then we can truly love God and other people.

A white knuckle declaration of loving God without an understanding of His love for us is just religion, and it is destined for eventual denial. The two loves go hand in hand, but knowing the love of God for us **MUST** precede any effective love for Him or others.

Beloved of God, ask Him today to show you how important you are to Him. He will hold out His hands to show you His scars. He will say to you, "Precious, precious child, I love you this much."

