

John on Jesus - Meet John
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Good morning Faith family. Welcome to our new teaching series titled “John on Jesus.” In this series, we are working our way through the Gospel of John, the story of God in the flesh.

Before we open John, we are taking this morning to introduce the apostle John, the author of the book. This morning, I don’t want to teach theology as much as I want you to understand John as a person. I want you to meet John. I want you to know him as a friend.

John wrote a large portion of the New Testament. Not only did he write the Gospel of John, he wrote three letters in our Bible known as 1, 2 and 3 John. He also wrote the book of Revelation. God did some amazing things with his life. While God used him in an extraordinary way, he was just an ordinary man. As we will see, he had weaknesses and character faults, just like we do. Jesus loved him and used his life anyway.

John before Jesus

Before we look at what happened when John met Jesus, we need to begin with John before Jesus. John, and his brother James, worked in the family fishing business. They worked for their father, Zebedee. Today, if you work in the family fishing business, that is a job you hope to grow out of. We think of the program “Deadliest Catch” and fisherman as blue-collar, minimum-wage people who didn’t graduate from high school. In that day, fishing was a good occupation. If you fished, you had enough money to buy boats. You had

employees. You had income and financial security. John and James were working with their father in the family business. It was the kind of business you looked forward to inheriting.

While John and James were fishing by the shore, along walks Jesus. He invites them to leave their nets and follow him. I always wondered about this. What would cause James and John to just leave everything for Jesus? Remember, they had a good living.

First, I don't think this was the first time they met. I believe John knew Jesus well. Nevertheless, Jesus was making a big ask of John. He asked him to walk away from financial security, a good livelihood and a secure financial future to follow Jesus. John, and his brother, took a calculated leap of faith to follow Jesus. They stepped away from the comfort of financial security and family to be with Jesus.

The Teacher-Student Relationship

What did it mean for John to follow Jesus? Did Jesus simply want John to follow him like a shadow? Today, when we want an education, we go away to school. We sit in front of a professor. We take notes. We study for tests. The professor goes home at the end of the day and the students go to their dorms. It didn't work that way in the first century.

In that day, students did life with their teacher. They ate together. They traveled together. They did life together. They became close friends. If you traveled with a team on a missions trip, you had a similar type of bonding experience.

When a teacher and their students lived together an education was caught more than it was taught. It is the way students became like their teacher, because they knew their teacher. That was John. He gave up everything to do life with Jesus so he could become like Jesus.

One thing we should remember about John is his age. He was the youngest of those following Jesus. John was probably in his mid-20s. In the group of disciples, John was the punk kid. He was the guy with the crazy ideas that age and maturity would put into perspective. In spite of his youth, the Bible gives us many clues that Jesus loved John. I think Jesus looked out for John like an older brother looks out for a younger sibling. Jesus had a special place in his heart for John

One of the twelve

It didn't take long for Jesus to become popular. When you are performing miracles and healing people, it tends to build a following. Mark 3 tells us Jesus went up to a mountainside and the crowd of people who wanted to be his potential students stood below him. Jesus needed to pare down the class. This was like picking kickball teams in elementary gym class. Everybody had their hands in the air saying, "Jesus, pick me!" You can imagine what it felt like for John. He was young. He didn't see himself as special. He was hoping he would be chosen, but out of the hundreds of people Jesus had in front of him, John didn't expect to be chosen. I am sure he thought others were much more qualified.

To his amazement, Jesus chose him again. Can you imagine the smile? Can you imagine the excitement of not just being called by Jesus once in the beginning, but after he is popular and Jesus pares down the class, being called by Jesus again?

John wasn't perfect.

When I first studied John, I pictured him as a child prodigy. He was young. He was called by Jesus. He seemed to do everything right. I struggle relating to prodigies, because I am not one. I make many mistakes. I am asking God for more grace and forgiveness all the time.

As I continued to study John, I began to realize he wasn't perfect. Jesus, put him in his place for his crazy ideas a number of times. In Mark 9 we find John trying to stop people who were casting demons out in Jesus' name. Why did John try to stop them? Were they doing something theologically wrong? No. They simply were not part of John's group. John was trying to stop ministry in Jesus' name when John's group was not getting credit. That is selfish. That is a control freak. Jesus rebukes John for his control freak attitude.

We see the same attitude coming out again in Mark 10. John, and his brother James, come to Jesus with a little request. They ask Jesus for two seats. These are not ordinary seats. They ask Jesus that when he begins ruling in his kingdom, James and John would like to be seated right next to him, one on his right, the other on his left. John is young but he is willing to run over everybody else to get what he wants. At times, he is power hungry. At times, all he thinks about is his own agenda.

In fact, John and James were both known for their tendency toward being strong-willed and hard-headed. In Mark 3, Jesus gave them a nickname. He called them the *Sons of Thunder*. When I hear that, I think of a motorcycle gang. I think of leather jackets and an attitude that occasionally needs to be put back into check. That is John.

All this is to say John wasn't perfect. He had his faults, just like we have ours. I can see Jesus calling John by his nickname with a smile on his face and a twinkle in his eye. What I love about this is Jesus loved John *in spite of his flaws*. This gives us hope. Jesus loves us in spite of our flaws and sinful failures.

One of the inner three

Jesus enjoyed multitudes following him. Sometimes, 20,000-25,000 at a time. Jesus pared down the class to the 12 he chose to pour his life into. John made that cut and was one of the 12. Jesus went through another paring down. Out of those 12, Jesus chose three he would share the most intimate experiences with. They were three fisherman: Peter, James and John. Let me show you what I mean.

John and the transfiguration

One of those experiences was the transfiguration. Jesus took Peter, James and John up a mountainside. Some of you remember the story. Jesus, while on earth, veiled his glory. If we looked upon Jesus in all of his glory with our sinfulness, we would die. When Jesus went up the mountainside that day, he chose to reveal, in some measure, his glory. What a privileged position! John

saw Jesus in some measure of his glory. Only James and Peter also see this. This is impressive.

When Jesus reveals all of his glory on the new heavens and the new earth, his glory is what lights the new heavens and earth. Think about this when you are basking in the glory of the sun this summer. Without our resurrection bodies, the unveiled glory of the S.O.N. is bright enough to kill!

Not only does John get to see Jesus in some of his glory, but Moses and Elijah appear. John also has the chance to hear God the Father speak and declare Jesus is his son. The 20-year-old young guy, who sometimes is so selfish all he can think about is himself seated next to Jesus, gets the privilege of seeing the glory of Jesus, Moses, Elijah and hearing the voice of God.

John trusted by Jesus

Not only did Jesus love John in spite of his faults, but Jesus also trusted him. When it came to the last supper, the great Passover meal before Jesus died, who do you think Jesus entrusted to set up the table? Jesus trusted Peter and John. They made all the arrangements. They bought the food. They laid the place settings and the decor of the room. I can see John bubbling with excitement to set this up. He knew it was important. He was on cloud-nine because Jesus entrusted him with this responsibility even though he was young. I can picture John and Peter rushing to get the final touches ready for the meal. I picture John peering out the window staring down the road waiting for the disciples to arrive.

This meal wasn't like a bag of burgers from McDonald's. This was similar to a Thanksgiving dinner. It was an intricate meal with precise traditions. Jesus trusted John to get it right.

At the meal, Jesus starts this odd conversation about betrayal. He says somebody sitting at the table will betray him. Somebody is a turncoat. Somebody will knife him in the back. As you can imagine, everybody goes ghostly white and begins looking around the room. Who will betray Jesus? What I find interesting is Peter looks over at John and tells John to ask Jesus for an answer.

Why does Peter, the head of the disciples and the man who becomes the leader of the early church, why does he ask John to talk to Jesus, the youngest most naive guy in the group? Jesus loved John, and everybody knew it. Jesus treated John like a little brother. Everybody knew that if Jesus was going to share that kind of information with somebody, it would only be with someone he loved. He loved John.

Picture this. They are eating the Passover meal. The Passover meal was usually eaten on a low table. People laid on their sides and propped themselves up on their elbows. It says John was sitting next to Jesus in the seat of friendship. Jesus and John were close. The Bible tells us John leaned back and put his head back on Jesus' chest. What do you imagine the look was in John's eyes? Do you think it was one of frustration? Do you think it was stress? I think it was a look of worry. I think he was truly worried that he could be the one to fail

Jesus. He loved Jesus. Jesus loved him. He asked Jesus, “It won’t be me, will it? I don’t want to fail you. I don’t want to betray you.”

How many people have the chance to put their head on the chest of God? How many people could look into the son of God’s eyes and call him a friend? Not many. John did. There was this incredible love and trust that existed between John and Jesus, even though John wasn’t perfect. He had his moments of failure, but Jesus still loved him.

John in the garden

One of those moments of friendship mixed with failure happened just after that meal. Judas left to betray Jesus. Jesus took his disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane. He took his inner core of three, Peter, James and John, to be with them. He asked them to pray. Jesus doesn’t ask many things of people. When he does ask, it is like EF Hutton talking. People listen. Jesus moved off about a stone’s throw away to pray by himself. It was obvious to Peter, James and John that Jesus was seriously stressed. They weren’t that far from Jesus. I am sure they heard the agony in his voice. I am sure they heard him crying out to God. Somebody saw the drops of sweat filled with blood as capillaries under his skin burst from the stress of what was about to take place on the cross. Jesus asked his three closest friends to be there for him. He asked them to pray. They could hear him crying and praying to God in distress. What did John do?

He fell asleep.

I can imagine him holding his stomach wishing he hadn’t eaten so much for Passover because all the blood was in his stomach digesting dinner. Three

times Jesus woke John and asked him to pray, but John failed Jesus each time. I can picture John snoring on his back with his hands over his swollen stomach. Jesus was his friend. Jesus chose him from among thousands to share his heart. Jesus brought him to see the transfiguration. Jesus trusted him with important assignments, like the Passover meal. John failed Jesus in his hour of need. All Jesus asked him to do was pray.

John and the trial

From that point forward, things changed for Jesus. Judas and a band of soldiers arrived. They arrested Jesus. Under cover of darkness, they ran Jesus through a series of trumped up trials on false charges. The Bible tells us Peter and John didn't run away. They were there. On the fringes of everything, Peter and John watched. They watched their leaders abuse Jesus. Don't you think John felt devastated? All Jesus asked him to do was keep watch and pray. Can you imagine the anger John felt as they abused Jesus, his best friend? Jesus is the one guy who kept believing in him. Jesus is the one guy who kept loving him even when he failed.

John and the Crucifixion

You know the story from here. Not only do they condemn Jesus to death, they condemn him to a bloody, gory death. They strip him, mock him and pull out his beard. They whip his back using a whip with hooks that tears out ribs, chunks of flesh and even entire muscles. They press thorns into Jesus' head. Thorns 2-3 inches long press into his skull. They take a rough piece of wood that is splintered and put it on his bloodied back. He carries it to his own crucifixion.

The Bible tells us John watched all that. Emotionally, John's heart was tearing out of his chest. The one man who loved him, the one man who believed in him, the one man who didn't let him go even when he failed him was being crucified.

John watched them pound 5-7 inch spikes into Jesus' wrists and feet. He watched the cross go up. He heard the thud as the cross sunk into the hole. He watched Jesus in agony.

The Bible doesn't tell us any other apostle was at the cross. It tells us John was there. He was there with the women. He was there with Mary, Jesus' mother. I am sure John's arm was around Mary's shoulder as she wept watching her son die. I am sure John was in tears as he watched Jesus, his friend, gasping for air. John watched Jesus' blood drip down the beam of the cross like a spilled can of red paint. Even though John failed Jesus when he needed him to pray, Jesus believed in him again.

On the cross, Jesus looked over at John and told him to care for his mother. He said to Mary, "This is your son." He said to John, "This is your mother." How much does Jesus love John? Enough to entrust his own mother into John's care.

Church history tells us John faithfully cared for her. John loved her. John served her.

John saw the empty tomb.

After they took Jesus down from the cross, his body was placed in a tomb. Three days later women returned from the tomb saying Jesus was risen. Two disciples broke into a sprint to get to that tomb. It was Peter and John. John,

being the young guy, outran the old man, Peter. John was the first apostle to see the empty tomb. He was the first apostle to be struck with the amazing news of the arisen Jesus.

John and the miraculous catch of fish

After Christ rose from the dead, at first, John and the apostles didn't know what to do. They went back to where they started. They went fishing. One morning, after a night of fishing when they caught nothing, Jesus appeared to them on the shore. Who was the first to recognize Jesus on shore? It was John! That morning, John ate with the resurrected Jesus. He talked with the resurrected Jesus. He touched the resurrected Jesus. I suspect, he even hugged the resurrected Jesus. Nothing had changed. Jesus still loved John. That was the one thing John couldn't forget. Jesus still loved him.

John and the early church

After Jesus returned to heaven, John became a rock-solid part of the early church. He was a preacher and a pastor. He worked with other leaders of the early church to unravel theological difficulties. As he aged, he wrote books that became part of our Bible. He wrote 1 John in which he talked about seeing with his eyes and touching Jesus with his hands. He also wrote 2 John and 3 John. He wrote the story of Jesus in the Gospel of John, the book we begin next week. In all his books, he writes with authority about Jesus. Why does he have authority? He said, "I was there. I know Jesus. I spent time with Jesus. I know Jesus' heart." He knew about Jesus' love.

Church history tells us John eventually pastored in Ephesus. One by one, he watched the other apostles die. Because he was the youngest and because of God's providential mercy, he lived the longest.

John and boiling oil

Church history tells us that as an old man, John was condemned to be boiled alive in oil. You can guess the reason. The church was growing. The apostles were dead, except for John. He was the last living witness of Jesus. If they could get John to recant and say Jesus was a lie, imagine how the church would crumble if John, one of the men closest to Jesus, admitted he was a phony.

Church tradition tells us that while John failed Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, he didn't fail Jesus here. They did boil him alive in oil, but they weren't able to kill him. John refused to betray Jesus, his closest friend.

John and exile on Patmos

Church tradition tells us that after they were not able to kill John, he was exiled to the island of Patmos, where Christ appeared to him. Christ encouraged him. Christ loved him and gave him the book of Revelation.

John's famous last words

Jerome, an early church father, tells us John eventually returned to Ephesus. He was a weak, frail old man. His body was scarred. On Sundays, the members of the church would come and take him in a chair. They would carry him to the front of the church to let him preach to the people. His voice was reduced to a whisper but when John spoke, a hush came over the crowd.

People leaned forward. He would whisper one sentence again and again, "Little children, love one another. Little children, love one another."

Conclusion

This week, as I was thinking about John, he became sort of a hero to me. I can relate to him. He failed Jesus many times, just like me. The great part is that even though he failed Jesus, Jesus never gave up on him. Jesus kept trusting him. Jesus kept believing in him. Jesus kept giving him opportunities.

When John looked back upon his life, what do you think is the one thing that defined him? Do you think it was the opportunity to teach in the early church? Do you think it was the opportunity to set the table for the Passover meal? Do you think it was the opportunity to witness the transfiguration? I don't think it was any of those. I think the one thing that defined him was that Jesus loved him. In fact, Jesus loved him so much, Jesus died on the cross for him.

This morning, I want you to know that Jesus didn't just love John. Jesus didn't just give second chances to John. Jesus didn't just trust John with responsibility. Jesus loves, trusts and gives second chances to you.

If you actually believe that, it changes everything. It will leave you completely transformed. You will be a totally different person. Your identity does not come from your job, from your marriage or from your money. Your identity comes from being loved by Jesus. Jesus loves you so much he died for your sins to bring you back to God.

Some of you think that isn't a big deal. You learned that as a child. Friends, if you really took the time to think about what it means to say the God of

the universe loves you so much that he died for you, it would change you. There is nobody more important in the universe than Jesus, and you can't be any more loved by anyone than you are by him today.

So as we begin the book of John, we need to understand why John wrote the book. He wants us to know how Jesus loves us. John wants the love Jesus has for us to be the way we love others. As John would say, "Little children, love one another."

Prayer

God, we thank you for John. We thank you that for the next year he will be our teacher. He will teach us how much Jesus loves us, just as he learned. We ask that you would help us to be good students of this book, not because we have to but because we get to, not because we must but because we are loved. We ask that you would teach us in this series how much we are loved and how deeply we are held in the affections of Jesus.

Jesus, we thank you that John understood how being fully loved by you means that love will overflow into our relationships with one another. So Jesus, as we enter this series, we pray that you would teach us how much we are loved and that from that you would teach us to love one another. Amen.



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