

Meditate on These Things

Meditate: (v)to focus one's thoughts on;
to reflect or ponder over.

*The Disciple Whom the
Crucified One Loved*

No. 6

THE DISCIPLE WHOM THE CRUCIFIED ONE LOVED

"The disciple whom Jesus loved." We read this expression only 4 times, all in the gospel of John: 19:26; 20:2; 21:7; and 21:20.

Why did John refer to himself in this manner, while none of the other writers ever made that reference?

We get a clue when reading John 21:21, 22: Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, "But Lord, what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me."

This alerts us to a plan in the mind and heart of Jesus that will unfold in the years to follow. Remember that John is writing this several years after the events were actually experienced.

The synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke were written well before the fourth gospel by John. Some think that John is writing at this time, after the three writers of the historical recording of the external details of Christ's ministry, in order to compose a more spiritual Gospel. This was to deal with misconceptions and heresies among both Jews and Gentiles regarding the authenticity and reality of Jesus as God's Christ.

It seems that John now, later in his life and ministry for the Lord, understands the matter, and humility prevents him referring to himself by name. It is not that John thought of himself of greater favor and importance before the Lord. His was a great responsibility and he sees that the Lord loved and trusted him enough for this great responsibility.

You see, John was there to tell the conclusion! Go with me through John's gospel, looking at his perspective regarding this great plan of our Savior. The last time John uses this expression is at the foot of the cross upon which our Lord was crucified.

Consider what gave John this perspective. He had **hindsight** because of the time passed, **insight** because of his presence of three years with the Lord, and **foresight** because of inspiration and purpose God had in him being there.

"Behold!" The ways that simple word shaped the life of the apostle John could never be measured. He wrote an entire gospel in an effort to tell the story, but ended his testimony with this affirmation: "Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that

the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25).

"Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). So the story begins. The idea of a lamb being sacrificed to atone for sins was by no means novel. For thousands of years, blood had been shed to reconcile wayward human beings with a holy God. But something was missing. Something better was required; more accurately, someone. At the appointed time, in accordance with an eternal plan, he who had come in the spirit and power of Elijah made the great announcement in human history. The Lamb provided by the Father Himself for the sins of humanity had finally arrived in the form of Jesus of Nazareth. The apostle John, among others, listened to the announcement. He responded to the

call. He followed God's Lamb, and kept following for three years.

He heard Jesus boldly predict, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (2:19).

He documented that most famous of promises, "God so loved the world, that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (3:16).

John was present to hear Jesus assure His disciples, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work" (4:34).

He was a part of the crowd when Jesus asserted, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh" (6:51).

John was witness to Jesus' comforting proclamation, "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (10:11).

He alone records Jesus' foreboding statement, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (12:23-24).

John's firsthand account provides precious insight into the mindset of Jesus as the end of His ministry drew near - "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say" Father, save me from the hour? But for this purpose I have come to this hour" (12:27).

How rich the climactic promises of Jesus preserved by John for all time!

Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me....I am the true vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing...a little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me.....I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world. (14:1; 15:5, 16:16, 33)

"Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" That is how this story began, and in perfect harmony with the Creator's will, it culminated at the only point possible for mankind's

redemption. God's Lamb had come to die.
God had provided Himself the Lamb!

So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them.....so the soldiers did these things, but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus 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!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home (19:16-18, 24-27).

"Behold!" This simple word changed John's life forever. He had heard it countless times over the course of the last three years as Jesus encouraged His disciples to look, to listen, to ponder. What must have gone through John's mind on the darkest of days as his Lord hung suspended between heaven and earth? Did he understand? Did he remember what that voice crying out in the wilderness had said three years before?

So much of the life of every disciple of Christ is based upon perspective. A healthy appreciation of the past can help to define the present. A grasp of the present can cultivate a constructive chart for the future.

That being said, of all the writers of the New Testament, who could claim a better perspective on the fulfillment of God's amazing plan to redeem mankind than John?

He heard the final cries of the Lamb with his own ears.

He watched as the drops of blood with the divine power to atone fell to the dusty ground.

John stood beneath the cross when all other men fled.

Mary, by this time, was very likely a widow. Nothing is said of Joseph after the narratives of Jesus' birth and childhood, though Jesus' brothers are mentioned throughout the gospels. Matthew even calls them by name - James and Joseph and Simon and Judas.

Where were they as their mother stood at the foot of her firstborn's cross? "Not even his brothers believed in him" (John 7:5).

Peter had left the Savior's side to weep in the gall of bitterness. Judas, immersed in the guilt of betrayal, had already hanged himself. Andrew? James? Philip? Bartholomew? Thomas? Matthew? James the son of Alphaeus? Thaddaeus? Simon? Jesus had told them the night before, "You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered'" (Matthew 26:31). And just as Jesus predicted, "all the disciples left him and fled" (Matthew 25:56).

"Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him" (Isaiah 53:10). The Good Shepherd had always known that He would lay His

life down for His sheep. For this purpose He had come to this hour. What must it have meant to the Good Shepherd, then, to look down from the cross with the weight of all the darkness in all the world on His shoulders, and to see John? "There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24).

As His time on earth drew painfully short, the son was naturally concerned about the future of His mother. And as He looked down from the cross, seeking someone to watch over her in the difficult days ahead, there was John - a lamb who had stuck close by the shepherd to the bitter end. No wonder he is described on more than one occasion as the disciple whom Jesus loved!

At the close of God's book, it is John through whom Jesus speaks His revelation. For decades following the

crucifixion, John used his firsthand perspective gained at the foot of the cross to inform, to encourage, to rebuke, to inspire - just as his Lord had done.

It is John who finally reveals Jesus' last promise for all humanity of all time. The same word that so powerfully shaped John's life, here, at the end, beckons us also to look, to listen, to ponder, and to respond to the assurance of God's Lamb. "Behold, I am coming soon" (Revelation 22:7, 12, 20).

May our own confident assertion be, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want....Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me" May we appreciate and continue to be inspired by John's precious perspective. May our prayer, though all others flee, be: *Jesus keep me near the cross....*