

The Spiritual Identity of John the Apostle! Pt.#1

John 21:20 Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?"

I. Understanding Primary and Secondary Rewards!

A. It is common to hear the testimony of a sincere believer who is spiritually dry, disillusioned or burned out. How does this happen? Simply by pursuing ministry and God's anointing without a proper Kingdom mindset! The good news is that renewal is within reach of any believer who will change their mindset.

B. Abraham is referred to as the father of faith (Rom. 4:16). The Lord appeared to him to show him how to truly live the 'life of faith'. First, the Lord revealed Himself to Abraham as his exceeding great reward or his primary reward in life.

Gen. 15:1 The word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."

C. Secondly, God promised Abraham wealth, honor and a historic impact on the earth (Gen. 12:1-3; 17:2).

Gen. 12:2 I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great...

D. There are two major categories of God's blessing or reward in our life. Our primary reward is Jesus Himself. Our secondary rewards include God's favor on relationships and circumstances (health, wealth) along with authority to influence or make impact on others.

E. John's life illustrates this very reality. Jesus as our primary reward speaks of the Spirit tenderizing and fascinating our heart by revealing the beauty of Jesus to us.

F. Our secondary rewards must not hinder our primary reward. Often when external blessings increase, people get preoccupied with them and so their relationship with God diminishes.

3 Jn. 2 I pray that you prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.

G. Disappointment often results when our secondary rewards are delayed or when they increase and decrease in different seasons. Jesus referred to this as "pruning" in our life (Jn. 15:2). When Jesus is our primary reward, we do not get burned out or disillusioned when our secondary reward is delayed or diminished because our heart can be renewed daily in encountering Jesus.

H. Jesus spoke strongly to the church in Ephesus and after telling them that He knew fully their works of service to Him He warned of a permanent loss of their ministry influence if they did not repent and return to their "first love"!

Revelation 2:2-4 "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. 4 Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love."

II. The Apostle John's Life Testimony: Becoming a Son of Thunder in the Spirit!

A. The life of John provides us with a picture of what Abraham's Kingdom mindset looks like. As a young man John had a wrong mindset but over time he changed it to a "first love" or "primary reward" mindset. When John was about 20 years old, Jesus prophetically named him a "son of Thunder". This prophecy marked his spirit and caused him to be alert to a new overall work of the Spirit in his life. This described how John would one day carry his heart before God and function in ministry.

Mk. 3:17 James...and John...to whom He gave the name..."Sons of Thunder"...

B. The 'thunder of John's heart' was expressed in his fleshly personality. Our heart thunders with ambition, lust, rejection, anger, bitterness, fear, or covetousness. The "thunder of God's heart" expressed how He loved John. The young brash apostle of pride began to catch on to God's purpose and became the apostle of love.

1 John 3:11 For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another,

2 John 5 And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another.

C. When John was about 90 years old, he wrote his Gospel. In Jn. 21:20, he wrote his "signature" for his life work. In this verse, he interpreted what it meant to him to live as a "son of Thunder".

Jn. 21:20 Peter...saw the disciple whom Jesus loved (John) following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?"

D. John wanted to be known by how he related to Jesus not by what he accomplished before men. His identity was based on his relationship with Jesus not his ministry for Jesus. In this verse, we see how John carried his heart before God. This gives us much insight into how he lived, what he did and why he did it. This passage defines what it means for Jesus to be our primary reward and to live as a son of Thunder. Our primary reward is to know and feel His love for us, to position ourselves to love Him and receive from His heart and receive insight into the secrets of His heart.

E. John had one of the greatest “resumes” in history being in relationship with Mary (Jn. 19:26-27) and the original apostles including Paul. John was instrumental in great revivals such as the ones in Jerusalem (Acts 1-6) and Samaria (Acts 8). John wrote five books of the NT, was promised by Jesus to rule on a throne in Israel (Mt. 19:28) and saw his name on one of the foundations in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:14). Yet, John never mentions his own name in the gospel he wrote but refers to himself five times as: *“the disciple whom the Lord loved”* (Jn. 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20).

III. John Begins to see Himself as the Disciple Whom Jesus Loved!

A. At some point in the journey to maturity John began to see (by a revelation of the Spirit) the truth about how Jesus really loved him. He then began to refer to Himself as “The Disciple that Jesus Loved” and was known by others as that “Disciple that Jesus Loved”!

John 13:23 Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved.

John 21:20a Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple (John) whom Jesus loved following...

B. The foundational truth that equips us to enjoy God as our primary reward is to know and feel His affection for us. God loves us in the way that God loves God. The Father feels the same intensity of love for us as He feels for Jesus. What does the Father feel when He looks at Jesus? The Father has delighted in Jesus from eternity past. There is a volcanic desire in His heart for Jesus. Jesus feels the same intensity of love for us. This great truth will transform our emotions.

John 15:9 As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.

John 17:23-24 That the world may know that You have...loved them as You have loved Me. 24 Father, I desire that they...may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory...

C. Our great reward is to walk in the anointing to understand and feel God's love. Our confession is, “Father, You love me like You love Jesus”. This makes our life great and meaningful. The thunder of God's heart touched John's spirit and John took a hold of this truth (Jn. 15:9; 17:23) as foundational to his identity. Even 70 years later, he was still saying, “I am the disciple that God loves (instead of a great revivalist). John included this truth as part of his signature verse. God has holy and intense emotions for us. Do you and I know the way you move God's heart?

D. This truth gives us the right to stand before God with confidence as one of “His favorites”. We are His greatest prize and the apple of His eye (Ps. 17:7-8). When we know the King loves us, we are unmoved even when others overlook or mistreat us. We can enter into the place where we no longer find it necessary to explain or defend ourselves because He is more than enough. This reality begins to happen when our identity is becoming fixed to the love of God for us and we no longer have other reputations to protect.

E. These statements made by Jesus to the disciples concerning this great love with which He loves us were made just before they denied Him. In our weakness, He delights in us. We confess, “Your delight is in me”. We stop negotiating with Him and receive His testimony about us. He knew what He was getting into at the time He chose us.

John 13:1 It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. NIV

Mt. 26:31 All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night...

IV. John Leaned on Jesus and Became an Extravagant Lover of God!

A. John leaned on Jesus' heart expressing his love and desire to be near God. He found his satisfaction and exhilaration in being a wholehearted lover of Jesus. We are only satisfied in satisfying God. John was saying, “I am one who leans on Jesus' heart because I love Him”. John had a masculine personality and yet, was not ashamed to be known as one who lived to love Jesus.

Jn. 21:20b The disciple...who also had leaned on His breast at the supper...

B. John is seen leaning on Jesus' heart, soon after Jesus rebuked him three times for his wrong spirit (Lk. 9:46-56; Jn. 13:23). John had boldness in Jesus' love without shame because of seeing the tenderness and passion of Jesus' heart. It is arrogant to not be bold because we think our sin is bigger than God's love and God's choice. God set this whole thing up for us. We cannot take His love at that level because it crushes our pride. It takes great humility to be bold in God's love.

C. The primary aspect of the anointing as a son of Thunder is to be an extravagant lover of God. The Holy Spirit is restoring the First Commandment to first place in the Church before Jesus returns. Therefore, this call as an extravagant lover of God that speaks with boldness is going out fresh from the Spirit to all that can hear it.

Mt. 22:37 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul...

D. We must agree with John's confession, "I'm loved and am a lover therefore I am successful". These confessions summarize our spiritual identity. We do not define our lives by our struggles. We are not despised of God and hopeless hypocrites. We must live by our spiritual identity (what we look like to God) instead of our natural identity (what we look like or think we look like to others)