

John, the Apostle.

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

Long before the first history was written the human race had its heroes. Mighty men who had brought deliverance in the day when some dire calamity threatened. They must not be forgotten, so all through the ages fathers have given to their sons the stories of the noble lives of their ideal men. So we have the mythologies of Greece, and the peculiar stories of early Rome, and heathen nations in recounting the glories of their ancestry carry you back through thousands of years, to that era, when their race issued from some fountain of divinity. Now John the apostle is not one of these purely traditional characters, he is one of the heroes of the New Testament days, and we have written records giving us some of the facts of that noble life; but evidently some of the early Christians thought that John was too great a man to have so little passed on to future peoples, and to the written testimony they have added an immense amount of traditional material. It may not be worth much to us, but it is interesting; for it is not John the favorite New Testament human character? Tradition tells us that, in the maturity of his power, John went to Rome. Now how he aroused the Emperor's antagonism it does not say, but tells us that he was thrown into a caldron of boiling oil, and as the early Israelites walked through the fire unscathed, so John comes forth from his awful trial uninjured. Tradition tells us that John had made a convert in Ephesus whom he loved with utmost fervency, a young man. The young man failed to keep his vows and in despair ran away to the forests and joined himself to a notorious band of cutthroats and robbers. This was a little thing to the great love of John, and away he went to the forest to bring him back. Nought he cares for the dangers of the way or the ferocity of the robber band, and as the shepherd seeking the lost sheep dares all to rescue it, so John here defied death, not in vain. Loves' rescue! Tradition tells us that when he was a very old man, they often found him playing with a tame partridge, and wondering that he, an apostle, should so waste his time, they asked him of it. He replied that a bow could not always be kept bent without injury. And then cruel tradition will not even let poor old John die when his time had come, for it insists that Jesus had said that John should not die, and notwithstanding the fact that John himself in the last chapter of his gospel explains Christ's words otherwise, the men of those early days insisted that the dead John was merely asleep. It was confidently affirmed by intelligent men that the ground where he lay rose and fell with his breathing and that the dust was moved by his breath. You know how much credence to give these stories. There are others, but enough; and after looking at four of them it is a relief to be able to come back from this loose footing to the solid ground of fact.

WHAT DO WE KNOW OF THE APOSTLE JOHN?

I. We know something of the family from which John came. His father's name was Zebedee, his brother's name James. They lived in Galilee close by the lake, and rowing in the early morning, defying the elements had given them strength of body that served John exceedingly well in his arduous work that was to be his unto the end of the first century. Fishermen, probably not very poor, for their servants accompanied them on their expeditions. Probably not exceedingly obscure, for John was known to the high priest and used that acquaintance to secure an "stranger" for Peter and himself at the trial of Jesus. There are those that say that this John was a blood relation of Christ. It cannot be substantiated. John's mother was alive at the time of Christ's ministry; but the fact that these minor things are being mentioned will suggest to you that we are not very fully informed as to the early home of the apostle John. How we would like to know more! Then we might be able to take that strong character at its highest and determine how much of that nobility was due to heredity and environment and how much was the direct result of ennobling work of Jesus Christ. O John you are not a little man, you stand not among the pigmies, but among the giants of history, and by your life you have written your name on many million hearts, we would like to analyse the power that lifted you up, the cause of so universal an esteem. How much of it was due to your parentage and home? For they be few to day who do not see that the natural man is to a large measure the product of his parentage and early surroundings; and even the regenerated man never wholly recovers from the defects of either.

Havelock Ellis in a recent article on, "the mental differences of men and women reminds us of the fact that we inherit ability, and pernicious tendencies from both parents equally. Sometimes we forget this and wonder why a son is not more like a father or a daughter more like a mother. Listen, "Men and women on the average inherit equally from both of their parents." That is, that the son gets just as much of his disposition and character from the mother as he does from the father. That does not seem to mean much in one generation, but when you look at the youth of today and realize that his nature is the product of three hundred marriages, then the question of heredity becomes stupendous. Then you see why the God of Israel forbade the Jews to take heathen wives. To get them to become pro-

phelytes was not enough, it would take many generations to get the lower heathen strain out of that family. If ever a woman was, by nature, her mother's daughter and her father's child, it was Queen Elizabeth. Love of flattery foolish care for apparel, daring coquetry, vain display of jewelry, in the toss of head, in the gesture, in the variety of moods the older courtiers saw a new Anne Bolyne without the older ones' beauty. But besides these they saw courage and resolution and power to rule, that characterized the great king Henry who had defied Rome and won. And then they saw traits of character that seemed like neither of her parents. For was she not the daughter of the many kings and queens? Did not the blood of William the Conqueror, and Coeur de Lion and John and Madcap Harry and Henry VII, flow in her veins? Yes, and of the Spanish and French, and German princesses that they married. What a combination she was! And what a ruler she was to spoil the pride of Spain! And when we turn to the Apostle John and enquire as to his family we do not know that much of him. No, we do not know the name of Zebedee's father, not even the name of his wife. We see John the product, we know not who came before, Jesus knew. He knew his man. He best suited his purpose. He took him and worked his work upon him and the world had the great apostle John. And how much of his greatness is due to his ancestry and how much to the hand of Christ we cannot say. But that the man was worthy we do not doubt.

II. We know how John was called. How graphically Luke describes it! The people thronged Jesus so that he thought it best to secure a rostrum with a strip of sea between him and the multitude. He stood in the bow of Simon's boat and gave the people the greatest message ever delivered to humanity. In return for the use of that boat we hear him say, "Launch out and let down your nets," they obey and have more fish than they and their partners could handle. Peter got down on his knees, "Depart from me;" but the great voice said "Fear not from henceforth thou shalt catch men." Now we have it, "When they had brought their ships to shore they forsook all and followed him. That "they" means Peter and Andrew, James and John. That was John's call to discipleship. He left the fish on the shore, just as they were, all tangled in the meshes of the net and went after Jesus because he had a clear proof of his Messiahship. This was not the first time that John had seen him. He had stood with Andrew on the banks of Jordan as John the Baptist had cried "Behold the Lamb of God" and they had followed after Jesus till he had told them where he dwelt, and they abode with him that day. Perhaps John was with him at Cana, and probably near him, now and then, during that year that Jesus toiled near Jerusalem. He had been attracted by Him, but had never yielded to him. John was not a quiet, cool, calculating man but he was not so rash as to throw away his livelihood to follow a new prophet till he was sure of his worth. Yes he had been attached, and drawn, and now after the miracle of the fish John says to himself, "now I have enough to convince me and he dropped all and went after him from Tiberius to Calvary and to Patmos and the Eternal City.

In this great world of ours there are many that walk with the Christ, but how many there are that have been attracted by him that have not left the world to follow him. Why do they wait? Do the men of our day need proof of his Divinity? Then turn to the word, to the world, to the lives of the many, and find it. Why do they wait? Would to God we could diagnose the cause that we might find a remedy. When Hannibal had swept over the Alps and brought terror down into Italy, the Roman army thirsted for the fight. They hastened out to meet the foe and died in sore defeat. The African swept down past Rome to stop the supplies of that city; and a great Roman general, Maximus said "Do not hurry O my countrymen let them exhaust themselves in delay." But the haughty Romans could not sleep with the men of Chartage on their soil; so out they went to do, and again to die in sore defeat. At length they saw that Maximus was right. The foregears from sunny Africa could fight. Yes, under Hannibal they seemed invincible, but far removed from home and all supplies, they could not wait; and when Rome left them alone to wait, they got on ships and in disgust went back to their dark continent. At that hour, Maximus, the apostle of delay, was the hero of Rome. Yes, there are times when it pays to wait. When the course that you are about to take is of doubtful nature then go slowly, till you are sure. But when before you stands the great strong Son of God bidding you follow in his steps, shall we then, adopt the Maxian policy? I trow not; we have looked not upon a miraculous draft of fishes, but we have seen and are seeing today a wondrous draft of men. He is the Christ! He is the Christ. Follow if it means to drop all.

III. We know something of John's weakness. In a sense we should be thankful for this. For if Jesus so loved the imperfect John then he can so love the imperfect me. What are John's weaknesses? He never betrayed, he never denied, he never went back. How was he weak? There is just one place in the whole New Testament where John appears before Jesus alone, that is where he comes and says "We saw a man casting out devils in thy name and we forbade him because he followed not with us." There he was jealous of Christ's power. He wanted to keep it in the

Apostle's hands, and he received the rebuke accordingly. Another weakness is recorded in Lk. 9. As Jesus passed on toward Jerusalem, James and John went ahead into a Samaritan village to prepare for his coming. But when the Samaritans knew that he was on the way to Jerusalem they would not receive him. The Apostles were angry at the slight to their Lord. Now John and his brother go to Jesus and say, "Lord wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" John waited vengeance, and received another rebuke. A third recorded weakness of the beloved apostle is given by Mk. when he tells us that James and John tried to secure a promise of the two first places in the kingdom, and so received the third rebuff. Now these three weaknesses are not small, jealousy, vengeance, and self seeking. No not small, they mark him well, a man—they distinguish him well from the Master. They show us why John in after years did write in his epistle, "If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves." What a pity! Why could he not have been flawless? For the same reason that you are not flawless. You are dust. The ancient Greeks did fit rude vessels out and go to seek the "Golden fleece." They sought it long and gained experience.

The ancient scientist did seek the stone that would turn all to gold and in the search discovered many useful things, but not that stone. Champlain came out from France to find the shores of India. He came to that great gulf upon our North, and up he went and though he did not find the land he sought, he found another land that in the course of years means something to the world. Discovered Canada. Are there any today that seek the perfect man in life, in history? They'll get experience. They'll find good men. But it is an innocent man or an innocent maiden indeed today that sees their choice without a flaw. No we are too old for that. All we demand, all we expect is that they shall have virtues enough to bury the flaws. No John was not flawless. But how often do we think of his mistakes? His virtues rise so high that the defects are in the shadow. If we cannot be perfect, can we not by a life of service, live in all humanity, cause men to forget the flaws? The cross of Calvary is our assurance that God will not remember them.

IV. We know something of John's bequests to a world. What did he leave behind? At the beginning of his ministry he said, "silver and gold have I none." He could have said it as truly on his deathbed. He left no millions, he founded no universities, not even an orphanage; but where is the philanthropist that is to rank with John. His seven churches in Asia are gone. Swept away in the Mohammedan hurricane, in the seventh century. Yes gone, but not till they had passed on their message to the four winds of heaven. Yes gone, but the members are in glory with their first teacher. We are not sure that John ever stepped on the continent of Europe, if he did not, it matters little, his gospel has. It has come to Europe and Asia and Africa and Australia and America to stay. The other gospels give the words and deeds of the Master. His gospel lays bare the Saviour's heart. And in the centuries it is heart that counts. It is the best beloved portion of the word of God. And his three epistles are simply love songs. Byron and Shakespeare have given us love songs of a certain type, the lower type. And when a man is fired by affection for his country he gives us love songs of a higher type. The Southerners are erecting a monument to the man who wrote Dixie. Should not the French remember him who wrote the Marseillaise? But when a man is inspired by his love for Jesus Christ, then take up the song reverently and sing it on your knees, for it is the highest of the high. And then what an artist (by the grace of God) John was? If Jesus had wanted us to understand the details of heaven he would have given them to us. And this is where the greatness of that picture in John's Revelation comes in. After he has given us the last stroke, we do not know more of the shape nor size nor location of Heaven than we did before. From that picture we grasp something of God's holiness and of the adoration given Him by the eternal throng. We see happiness at its highest and suffering at the deepest. He gives us a wonderful confusion of materialistic terms and after he has ended we have a firmer faith in both the glory of Heaven and the darkness of the pit. But yet in all that use of worldly colors he has not presented a single idea that will not fit in with the most spiritualized conception of the world of the Redeemed. Before John took up his pen we had "The Father's house." After John had written, "The Father's house," meant more to us, though we cannot the better describe it either outside or in.

They tell us that when John was too old to walk to church, they carried him there on a litter. Then he grew too weak to speak at length, and always gave the same brief address, "Little children love one another." His disciples weary of hearing it, asked why he always gave the same message. He replied, "These are the words of the master, if we did that only it would suffice." Only a story yet that short message would fit in well with what we know of John before.

O John you are gone, and whether thy dust does rest on Patmos isle or floats with the Aegean tide, it matters not, thou art with him in the Great City! And down here, we have the influence of the "seven churches" thy gospel, thine epistles, yes, and the inspiration of thy vision of the eternal city! And for thy life we thank him that called thee from thy boat to a world, beloved John!