

I Am the Beloved Disciple

Thomas Robinson, October 10, 2010

John 21:17-25

¹⁷ The third time [Jesus] said to [Peter], "**Simon son of John, do you love me?**"

Peter was distressed because Jesus asked him the **third** time, "Do you love me?" He said, "**Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.**"

Jesus said, "**Feed my sheep.**" ¹⁸ *Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but **when you are old** you will stretch out your hands, and **someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.**"*

¹⁹ Jesus said this to indicate **the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God.** Then he said to him, "**Follow me!**"

²⁰ Peter turned and saw that the **disciple whom Jesus loved was following** them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?" [13:25]) ²¹ When Peter saw him, he asked, "**Lord, what about him?**"

²² Jesus answered, "*If I want him to remain alive until I return, **what is that to you? You must follow me.***"

²³ Because of this, the **rumor spread** among the believers that **this disciple would not die.** But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "*If I want him to remain (alive) until I return (come), what is that to you?*"

²⁴ This is **the disciple who testifies** to these things and who **wrote them down.** We know that **his testimony is true.**

²⁵ Jesus did **many other things as well.** If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

John 1:14, 16-18 ¹⁴ And the **Word became flesh** and dwelt among us, and **we have seen his glory,** glory as of the only Son from the Father, **full of grace and truth** ¹⁶ And from his fullness **we have all received, grace upon grace.** ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; **the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.**

John 6:67-69 ⁶⁷ So Jesus said to the Twelve, "*Do you want to go away as well?*" ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, "**Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life,** ⁶⁹ *and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.*"

John 15:12-13 ¹² *My command is this: **Love each other as I have loved you.*** ¹³ *Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.*

Ephesians 1:3-11 (the Message) Praise be to God, the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ. He takes us to the high places of blessing in him. Long before he laid down earth's foundations, **he had us in mind,** had settled on us as the **focus of his love,** to be made **whole and holy by his love.** Long, long ago he decided to **adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ.** (What pleasure he took in planning this!) He wanted us to enter into the celebration of his lavish gift-giving by the hand of his beloved Son. Because of the sacrifice of the Messiah, his blood poured out on the altar of the Cross, **we're a free people – abundantly free** of penalties and punishments chalked up by all our misdeeds. **It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for.**

The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple

The Gospel of John has the thread of personal testimony running through it. “*We have received grace...*” “*...that you may believe.*” In the final verses we learn that the Gospel is the testimony of “*the disciple whom Jesus loved*” (first in 13:23). His is personal testimony, written by him; received by others: “*We know....*”

In our journey through John we’ve seen that testimony unfold: from the first “*Behold the lamb...*” New wine. Born of Spirit. Living water. Bread of Life. Neither do I condemn... Light of the World. Sight for the Blind. Good Shepherd. Resurrection and Life. King of Israel. Washing feet. Love one another. I am the way. See the Father. The Counselor comes. One with Jesus and the Father. Pilate, what is Truth. The Cross. The Resurrection. My Lord and My God. Feed my Sheep.

The B.D. takes us inside the events to let us see them both as they happened and as the disciples reflected on them later. We perceive the whole story and meaning. The raw events were important, but the truth of what was really happening was often so challenging that the disciples could only understand by later reflection.

The world could not contain the whole story of Jesus: Light shining in darkness.

Peter and the Beloved Disciple – Two Stories

Jesus lovingly draws Peter to his life mission expressing love for Jesus, feeding Jesus’ lambs. Jesus even points enigmatically to Peter’s death. Jesus knows! Peter sees the B.D. following and wants to know what Jesus knows about him. He offers another enigma: “*If I want him to remain till I come, what is that to you?*”

Jesus works individually in the life of each person. Our stories interact in many ways, but it is not our task to check whether someone else has fewer trials, more open doors, whatever. We have one task: “*You follow me!*” In fulfilling that we learn who we are created to be, true freedom to experience eternal life, profound love.

A little insight into how Jesus’ words were interpreted and sometimes misunderstood. The B.D. has died or perhaps is near death. Followers had taken the saying as a prediction of Jesus’ coming rather than an emphatic way of telling Peter to stay focused on his own call to follow Jesus. The event forces reinterpretation and provides a way of telling us that it is the B.D.’s voice that we hear in the Gospel.

Who is “the Disciple whom Jesus loved”?

The B.D. intentionally does not reveal his own name. None of the Gospels identifies its author. Mt. Mk. and Lk. bring together shared memories of Jesus. Jn. is more personal. No one truly knows who the B.D. was; tradition identifies him as John.

It is also a bit strange that he calls himself “*the disciple whom Jesus loved.*” It seems rather self-congratulatory, not fitting the spirit we see in the Gospel. Perhaps the key to understanding this is in the statement of the “*We*” about the B.D. in 21:24.

Here’s my hypothetical guess about what happened. The disciple dictated the Gospel to co-workers (“*we*”) in his community (like Paul, Rm. 16:22). He called himself simply the “*other disciple*” (18:15; 20:2). As he lay dying, his friends asked to include his name in the Gospel. He told the story of Jn 13 “*Love...as I have loved you.*” “*Then I knew that I was the ‘disciple whom Jesus loved.’*” “*We*” included that designation.

Jesus loved Peter, Thomas, Martha, Mary, Mary Magdalene, Nathanael, the others. Each learned in their own way that they were “*the disciple whom Jesus loved.*” Each of us learns in our own journey with Jesus, “*I am the Beloved Disciple.*”