

# The Disciple Whom The Crucified Loved

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*“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 a novel concept. 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 greatest 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. 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”* (John 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”* (John 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”* (John 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”* (John 6:51).

John was witness to Jesus’ comforting proclamation, *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep”* (John 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”* (John 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 this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour”* (John 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”* (John 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.

*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 (John 19:16-18, 24-27).*

"Behold!" A simple word that 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 his mind on this 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 stood beneath the cross when all other men fled.

Mary, by this time, is believed to have been a widow. Nothing is said of her husband Joseph after the gospel narratives of Jesus' birth and childhood. Jesus' brothers are mentioned throughout the gospels (*Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21; John 2:12*). Matthew even calls them by name—James and Joseph and Simon and Judas (*Matthew 13:55*). 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 hung 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 had predicted, "*all the disciples left him and fled*" (*Matthew 26:56*).

"*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 of 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!

May our own confident assertion be,

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures.  
He leads me beside still waters.  
He restores my soul.  
He leads me in paths of righteousness  
for his name's sake.*

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me.*

*You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.  
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord  
forever.*

May we appreciate and be inspired by John's precious perspective. May our prayer, in turn—  
though all others flee—be,

Jesus, keep me near the cross:  
There a precious fountain,  
Free to all, a healing stream,  
Flows from Calv'ry's mountain.

Near the cross, a trembling soul,  
Love and mercy found me;  
There the Bright and Morning Star  
Sheds its beams around me.

Near the cross! O Lamb of God,  
Bring its scenes before me;  
Help me walk from day to day  
With its shadow o'er me.

Near the cross I'll watch and wait,  
Hoping, trusting, ever,

Till I reach the golden strand,  
Just beyond the river.

In the cross, in the cross,  
Be my glory ever,  
Till my raptured soul shall find  
Rest beyond the river.

Published in  
*Beneath The Cross: Essays and Reflections on the Lord's Supper*  
DeWard Publishing