

The best fisherman on the Sea of Galilee was old man Zebedee.¹ He hired me as a young man because I was so strong that I could haul nets all night long and never get tired. He would tell the others, “Careful not to knock muscleman overboard he’ll sink to the bottom like a rock. I always wondered if that’s where Jesus got the idea to change my name from Simon the Fisherman to Peter the Rock.”²

Over time, Zebedee made partners of his sons, James and John in his business. And also my brother Andrew and me³ We did well as a partnership, until Jesus came along and offered us the opportunity to be fishers of men instead of fishers of tilapia. Lifechanging. It was abrupt and borderline rude that we immediately left poor Zebedee when we heard the offer, but he stayed in business without us.⁴

My brother Andrew and I were from the tiny village of Bethsaida, near the northeast shores of the Sea of Galilee.⁵ We knew James and John from the time we were small children. Inseparable then, and we stayed inseparable through our time with Jesus. In fact, many people considered us to be the inner circle of Jesus. I tell you all of these things to explain how well I knew John, the writer of the *Gospel of John*.

John not only wrote the *Gospel of John*, but *First, Second and Third John*, and the book of *Revelation*. He wrote the *Gospel of John* many decades after the death of Jesus, and after the gospels of *Matthew, Mark and Luke* were written. He was familiar with those three gospel stories and didn’t feel the need to replicate them or duplicate much of what they had to say.

Some of your modern scholars think John was trying to fill in events that the other gospels didn’t address. If so, there was plenty of material for John, because as he wrote, Jesus did so many things that even the whole world would not have room for the books that could be written about them.⁶

¹ Mark 1:20

² Matthew 16:18

³ Luke 5:7-11

⁴ Luke 5:11, John 21:3

⁵ John 1:44. The lake level has dropped in recent decades and the village is not as close as it used to be.

⁶ John 21:25

I think that's partially true, but I think the main reason John wrote his gospel the way he did is that he saw the world entirely differently than the rest of us. John came closest of any apostle to seeing the world through Jesus' eyes. John's eyes looked through lens of love. They looked through lens of spiritual insight the rest of us didn't have. It is no wonder John was described as the one Jesus loved.⁷ It is also no wonder that as Jesus was dying, he entrusted his mother to John.⁸ John and Jesus had a special bond, everyone knew it.

Matthew and Luke begin their gospels talking about events surrounding the birth of Jesus. John begins his gospel by talking about the birth of time.

I was never jealous of John... as a person, but I did envy his way with words. Nothing ever written is as sublime as the first lines of the *Gospel of John*: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word was with God in the beginning. All things were made by him; and without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men."⁹

John conveyed so much in so few words. Jesus and God existed together before the beginning of time. Jesus is the Word, Jesus is God. Everything that exists was made through Jesus. All life comes through Jesus. Jesus is the light and life of all mankind.

Then my friend, John, followed his opening statement with words that would resonate throughout the centuries, words that would both unite and cause dissension in the churches. Listen, "And the Word was made flesh, and lived among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."¹⁰

The God of the Universe became a man and lived among us as a man. We were all witnesses of that fact. We personally lived with the Son of God, who was himself God,¹¹ and knew him to be full of grace and truth. Why we apostles were chosen to live with Jesus is still a mystery to me.

How does any human even begin to comprehend any of those statements John made about Jesus? Maybe we can't on our own. Maybe that is why God sent John the Baptist. He came as a witness to testify to Jesus. Even John the Baptist himself said that he wasn't the light of the world, but Jesus is.

From thousands of years later, you might question why God had to send John the Baptist ahead of Jesus. Why didn't God just send Jesus in a spectacular entrance from Heaven so everyone would know who he was? That's what I would have done. I can't fully answer that question, but

⁷ John 13:23, 19:26, 21:7

⁸ John 19:26

⁹ John 1:1-4

¹⁰ John 1:14

¹¹ John 1:18

I can tell you that God had been planning the entrance of Jesus and the need for John the Baptist for countless eons. God had given the Jews notice of it through the prophets, especially Malachi. The Jews were expecting a forerunner of the Messiah, but they didn't recognize John the Baptist as being that person.

John the Baptist did just what he was supposed to do. He prepared the way for Jesus by convincing people of their unrighteousness, talking about Jesus, gathering disciples to be ready for Jesus, and then dying so he would not be a distraction or competition. John the Baptist was so amazing that Jesus called him the greatest man ever to be born.¹²

One of the most lasting accomplishments of John the Baptist was that he trained, and then turned over to Jesus, the first dedicated follower of Jesus...my brother, Andrew.

James, John, Philip, Nathaniel and I joined Jesus, too. We followed Jesus to Cana, where he did his first public miracle. Cana was only eight miles from Jesus' home town of Nazareth, and the family of Jesus most likely knew many people from there. On this occasion, Jesus' mother and family members were attending a wedding, as we were.

The wedding party was going well when a most embarrassing thing happened – the host ran out of wine. In that society, that would have been a huge social disgrace and a bad omen for the newlyweds. Jesus' mother might have been part of the wedding providers, because she was aware of the problem. She came to her son and simply said, "They have no more wine." Jesus seemingly wanted to stay uninvolved, but like a good mother and friend, she just told the nearby servants to do as Jesus said. She didn't know how Jesus would solve the problem, but she had faith that he would.

You can imagine Jesus taking a big sigh, giving Mary a loving look, and then telling the servants to fill six huge jars with about 150 gallons of water. What followed was quite a sight. Servants rushing out to the public well and drawing huge amounts of water, and then hauling through the crowd to the six jars. It took many trips and caused quite a scene. When the jars were filled to the brim, the servants took some of the water out and took it to the master of ceremonies. It was not only wine, but the best wine. Instead of an embarrassing announcement of the wine being gone, the master of ceremonies complimented the bridegroom for saving the best wine for last.

We didn't know it at the time, but the miracle of the wine was an indication that a new religion was coming to replace the old Jewish religion, and the new would be far better than the old. After the wedding, Jesus, his followers and his family went to Capernaum, the site of his new headquarters.

Like the other Gospel writers, John did not always follow a strict chronological sequence. At this point in his story, John says that Jesus went up to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. He

¹² Matthew 11:1

doesn't say the path Jesus took, but Jesus often came toward the Temple from the south, going by the Pool of Siloam, on the southern edge of the old City of David. Jesus would climb the steep hill on the slick coffee colored paving stones laid by Herod the Great. He would pass the small shops by the side of the road where vendors sold food, animals to sacrifice, and changed money. His face would darken as he remembered how they took advantage of his mother and father. But he never expressed his disapproval of these services that were needed to worship in the Temple in the manner required by the Temple leaders.

On that particular day, we completed the ceremonial cleansings in the pools south of the Temple Mount, and reciting the Psalms of Ascent, we climbed the Southern Steps . We climbed the stairway to the top of the Temple Mount, and headed toward the Temple. Jesus stopped. He stared at the Temple courts which were packed with even more vendors! An expression clouded his face, one that none of us had ever seen. He moved to the side and grabbed a long cord. What is he doing, I thought. He rose and slowly, walked toward a vendor of doves and pigeons.

Then, in cold fury, he overturned tables, opened cages and animal pens. He had made the cord into a whip! He drove out the people, the cows, the sheep. The turmoil only increased when the coins of the money changers hit the stones! People scrambled to avoid Jesus' whip and grab as many coins as they could. It was pandemonium, but the courts soon emptied out. Jesus stood there panting, and the Jewish leaders rushed him in a panic, worried more about the nearby Romans than about the loss of money. They certainly were not concerned that God's house was being profaned.

Pointing fingers at Jesus, they demanded a sign to signify by whose authority he was acting. This might have been a ploy to get him to do a miracle, but I think they could have been concerned that Jesus was acting under the authority of the Romans, who worried about collecting taxes on everything. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Jesus challenged them, unexpectedly.

The leaders were incredulous, as you would have been. They looked around at stones as big as small houses, in a temple that had taken forty-six years to build! He could not possibly re-build it in three days. I think they had some suspicion that Jesus could miraculously tear down the Temple in front of their eyes.

But, Jesus was not the Temple building, he was talking about his body. He was prophesying about the manner of his death and resurrection, but nobody, including the apostles, had any idea of what he was talking about. After Jesus died and was resurrected, we remembered what he had said that day.

During the remainder of Passover, Jesus performed many signs and wonders, and many people believed in him. One of the Jewish leaders came to meet with Jesus at night. He was a great teacher who wanted to ask about the teachings of Jesus. Nicodemus listened as Jesus endeavored to teach him about the mysteries of the teachings. Like a mustard seed, those teachings took root in his heart, and he eventually became a follower of Jesus.

John concluded this portion of his narrative with a special gift to the world. In one of the most quoted verses of the New Testament, John summarized the unbelievable gift of God. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life."

So profound. Life changing, wouldn't you agree?