

Has any mother hurt like I did that day? No other mother has been the mother of Jesus, the Son of God.

Jesus was consecrated soon after his birth, and Simeon prophesied that a sword would pierce my soul. It felt exactly like that three decades later watching my Jesus die on the cross. Pierced. Indescribable, the pain.

I'm near the cross with some other women, John is close by. Jesus grunts in pain, he pushes up on his nailed feet to grab a fleeting breath. "Woman, here is your son...here is your mother."¹

Shortly, Jesus dies. A hand takes my arm...leads me away. My new son, John. God let a bunch of jealous, angry men kill his son, MY son. Why? Why?

You know the rest of the story of Jesus, so you know why. What you don't know is what happened to me after that day. There are many church traditions, and certainly many stories, but there is nothing in the Bible about me after the coming of Holy Spirit on Pentecost.²

What I can tell you is this; John took care of me for the rest of my life. I was only about fifty years-old when Jesus died, so John and I had many years together. We spent innumerable hours talking about our three favorite topics (counts on fingers) Jesus, love, and...God. This is what qualifies me to tell you about the book of *First John*, a book written by John about six or so decades after the death of my son.

John doesn't open his letter with a salutation to anyone, but later he says he writes to his dear children, to fathers, and to young men. To his dear children because their sins have been forgiven, and they know the Father. To fathers because they know Jesus and God, and to young men because they have overcome Satan, are strong, and the word of God lives in them.

John opens his letter by testifying to the fact that Jesus was with the Father, and then came to Earth to be with us. Jesus is the eternal Word of Life whom we have seen and heard.

¹ John 19:26-27

² Acts 1:14

This is the message Jesus brought: God is light, and in him there is no darkness. If we walk in the light, and have fellowship with one another and with Jesus – his blood purifies us of all sin. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive us and purify us of all righteousness.

Might not sound like a lot to you, but to the ancient Jews, that would have been incredibly good news. Through all their many sacrifices and careful, utmost obedience, through the ritual of a scapegoat, their sins were never fully and finally forgiven. They never had assurance of forgiveness for all of their sins. Through Jesus, John says believers can have full certainty of the forgiveness of their sins.

This is critically important, because John is extraordinarily clear – all people sin. If they claim otherwise, they are liars. Yes, Christians sin. Praise the Lord, Christians are enabled to be forgiven. Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

What should be our response to this unimaginable privilege? To keep the commands of Jesus! This is how we know that we know Jesus, we keep his commands. Whoever claims to live in him must live as he did.

How did Jesus live? With complete love. So, John isn't writing a new commandment when he makes his next observation. If you love your fellow brothers and sisters, you are in the light. If not, you are in the darkness, you walk around in the darkness, and are blinded by the darkness.

As important as it is to love each other, it is equally as important not to love the world or things of the world. From the world come the craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These things will pass away, but whoever follows God's will lives forever.

John probably wrote the letter of *First John* during a time of persecution of Christians by the Roman Empire. He acknowledges that many have left their lives as Christians. More than likely some left because of persecution, and others left just because their devotion to following Jesus dimmed and acting as a Christian became burdensome. The fact that these people left is a sign that they never really belonged in the first place. They weren't truly devoted. So devoted that their actions aligned with that devotion. These people are antichrists because they deny that Jesus is the Christ. They deny the Father and the Son.

Those who remain faithful, however, remain in the Son and the Father. They have eternal life. They have an anointing that teaches them about all things. Those that remain faithful may be confident and unashamed before Jesus when he returns for them. When he appears, we will be like him. In anticipation of that, all who have hope should keep themselves pure.

Remember that John's favorite topics, and mine as well, are love, Jesus and God, John brought those topics together in one of my most favorite sentences in the whole Bible. "See what amazing love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called his children." Amazing love, lavished on us! We are his children!

The reason Jesus came to earth was to destroy Satan's work, to lead his children to righteousness. This is how you can tell who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil. God's children do what is right and love their brothers and sisters. The devil's children do not do what is right and do not love their brothers and sisters.

If the children of the devil are tantamount to life-takers, the children of God are tantamount to life-givers. They lay down their lives, their material possessions for those in need. They love with actions and truth, not just with words.

God's children keep his commands and please him. To believe in the name of his Son, Jesus...to love one another...to live in him. We know we live in him by the Spirit he gave us.

There is an old story about a preacher, renowned for his speaking ability and when asked the secret of his success, said, "I tell them what I'm going to tell them, I tell them, and I tell them what I told them." That preacher probably read the book of *First John*. John never tires of saying the same things, which is fine with me because they are so important.

John's next topic may be hard for you to fully comprehend. In John's time, there was a group of Christians who could not fathom how a perfect, spiritual God could come to earth in fleshly form, because to them earthly things were sinful. This misunderstanding caused them to lead many astray, and would become a movement known as Gnosticism.

John clearly states that every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ came in the flesh is from God. Any spirit not acknowledging that is not from God, and is the spirit of the antichrist. These are from the world, and the world listens to them. They are the spirit of falsehood.

Modern psychologists have a technique called "word association." Imagine word association with the ancient Jews, and had them finish this sentence with one word: "God is..." You probably would have heard: God is harsh, God is just, God is jealous, God is righteous. How would you finish that sentence? (very long pause)

Here is how John finishes that sentence: God is love. Love! How this changed everybody's viewpoint of God! With this revelation, John can say that everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

This is love. Not that we love God, but that he loves us and sent Jesus as a sacrifice for our sins. How can we possibly comprehend that? An infinite God loving sinful human beings so much that he sacrificed his own Son on their behalf! That is love. If God loves humans so much, then we, humans, should love each other, too.

Whoever lives in love, lives in God, and God in them. We love because God first loved us.

Here is an observation of John's: Whoever claims to love God, yet hates a brother or sister, is a liar. For whoever doesn't love the person they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. And, this is love for God: keep his commands.

Who overcomes the world? Only those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God. We can believe the testimony of God which comes by these three: the Spirit, the water and the blood. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Whew. John has told us what he is going to tell us, and he has told us. Now, he will conclude by telling us what he told us. Those who believe in the name of the Son of God have life. If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. Those who are born of God do not continue to sin. We are children of God. God is love.

These messages seem obvious to those who grew up believing in a loving God, but they were great news to those who grew up only knowing a harsh God. Why did so many know him as a harsh God? One reason is because so many worshiped idols and the things of this world instead of God, and God punished them for it. That is why John ends his letter of love on a short, harsh note.

"Dear children, keep yourselves from idols." Keep yourself from idols!

Idols aren't just ancient pieces of stone or wood. Anything that you love instead of God, that is an idol. How do you know whether you have any idols in your life? How do you spend your time? Your emotions, your resources?

God is love. He loves you. He wants you to love him.