

X-treme Faith

I recently taught a class on the supernatural power of God. Frankly, I had mixed emotions about it – Numerous times in our lives, the Lord has amazed Darlene and I with bona fide miracles from genuine healings to earthquakes to obviously divine provision, angelic protection and supernatural knowledge. However, in the latter part of our pilgrimage, He has been bringing home an understanding that is to us stronger and even more valuable as God's children. To amplify and make the point clear, I'm going to present the following excerpts from a study on the disciple John from the well known writer, Beth Moore.

After beating Jesus within inches of His life, soldiers held His hands and feet against the crude wood and fastened Him there with a hammer and three long nails. Whether or not John saw the pounding of the hammer, heaven could hear the pounding of his heart. At a time when any thinking man would want to run for his life, John, probably the youngest of all the disciples, stayed near the cross.

Above young John hung his world, his hero, his attachment, his future, his leader, the love of his life. Three years earlier he was trying to gain his daddy's approval with a boat and net. He hadn't asked for Jesus, Jesus asked for him. And here he stood. Isaiah tells us that by the time the foes of Jesus finished with Him, "his appearance was so disfigured

beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness" (Isa 52:14).

"When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, 'Dear woman, here is your son'" (John 19:26). Don't take it lightly. Hear it. Not the way the passion plays do it. Hear the real thing. Hear a voice erupting from labored outburst as Jesus tried to lift Himself up and draw breath to speak.

Because Jesus' condition made speech harder than dying, every word spoken from the cross is critical. Chronic pain is jealous like few other things. It doesn't like to share. A man in pain can hardly think of anything else; yet Jesus did. Perhaps His heart's pain exceeded the pain of His shredded frame. The look on His mother's face. Her horror. Her suffering.

Then He gazed straight into the young face of the one standing nearby. Less than 24 hours earlier John's face had nestled against His chest in innocent affection. John was the baby of the family, as we call Melissa, and he knew it. He no doubt reveled in its privilege. If anyone had an excuse to run from the cross, perhaps it was John. But he didn't.

Jesus saw the disciple whom He loved standing nearby. I believe love and compassion hemorrhaged from His heart. "To the disciple, [He said,] 'Here is your mother.' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home." (John 19:27).

If the cross is about anything, it is about reconciliation: "He himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph 2:14). I think the unbelief of Christ's brothers had raised a wall of hostility between them and His disciples. As Christ gazed on His beloved mother and His beloved disciple, He saw His own two worlds desperately in need of reconciliation and a woman who no doubt was torn between the two.

Simeon's prophecy to Mary was fulfilled before Jesus' very eyes: "A sword will pierce your own soul too" (Luke 2:35). How like Jesus to start stitching a heart back together even as the knife was tearing it apart. One day soon His family and His disciples would be united, but the firstfruit of that harvest waved beneath the cross of Christ: "From that time on, this disciple took her into his home: (John 19:27).

How perfectly appropriate! Right at the foot of the cross we discover the element that set John apart from the rest. I am a huge fan of Peter and can relate to him far more readily than John, but the inspired words the Holy Spirit later entrusted to the Son of Thunder (see Mark 3:17) suggest a profound uniqueness. I am reminded of a saint about whom God said, "My servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly" (see Num 14:24). God didn't mean a different Holy Spirit. God referred to something wonderful about Caleb's human spirit that made him unique. I

believe John had something similar. These were fallible men prone to the dictates of their own flesh just like the rest of us, but they had something that was almost incomparable when overtaken by the Holy Spirit. They were simply different.

You and I have arrived at a red-letter moment on which much of the remainder of our journey hinges. I am convinced we've stumbled on the very thing that set John apart and made him the fertile soil into which God could sow the seeds of such a Gospel, such epistles, and such a revelation. John remained nearby Jesus, whether his leader was on the mount of transfiguration or in the depths of Gethsemane's suffering. John affectionately leaned on Him during the feast but also followed Him into the courts for the trials. John clung to Jesus when He raised the dead, and he clung to Jesus when He became the dead.

*John stood nearby when human reason implied that his faithful leader's mission had failed. He could not have comprehended that the plan of the ages was going perfectly. Yet he remained. He who looked on a face that "shone like the sun" (Matt 17:2) was willing to look on a face that was bloody and spit upon. He stayed nearby during Christ's brightest hour and His darkest hour. The young disciple **knew Jesus in the extreme** (emphasis added). John was willing to look when others covered their eyes. And he beheld Him. How can we*

behold what we are unwilling to see?

We cannot claim to know anyone intimately whom we've not known in the intensity of both agony and elation. Anyone with eyes willing to truly behold Jesus will at times be confused and shocked by what she sees. You see, if we're willing to be taken to the extreme of His glory where we gain intimate knowledge, we will undoubtedly see Him in situations that we cannot explain and that sometimes disturb. Then comes the question: Will we walk away from Jesus when our human understanding sees Him look weak and defeated? Do you know what I mean by that question?

What will we do when we can't explain what Jesus is doing? Will we remain nearby when He doesn't stop a tragedy? Based on earthly evidence, human reasoning concludes that He is either mean or weak. Think, Beloved, about what I'm saying. Will we cling when our human reasoning implies that evil has defeated Him? Or that evil seems to be found in Him? Will we stand by faith when human logic says to run?

That's what will make us different.

And God has called us to be different. On the mission field in Europe, when our first son died, the well meaning people around us as well as the enemy our souls left us feeling like the tragedy had happened because we simply lacked enough faith. It was a brutal

club of condemnation until the truth of scripture shined into our hearts. Forever, God is still a God of miracles and by His grace we've witnessed many, but by far the greatest power of God is to transform a faithless worm into a child of the Most High – one who will follow his/her Good Shepherd whether He is transfigured or disfigured in their sight. May God grant each of us the extreme faith to do as Jesus did on the cross and as John did before the cross – both continued in love through the deep dark place. Both looked up as must we.

Perhaps you don't know the Lord Jesus in a personal way. Maybe you've heard about Him or have even been raised in a godly household but you don't personally know Him intimately as Savior, Lord and Friend. When He died on that cross, He did it for you. He laid His life down – no one took it from Him. Then on the morning of the third day following, He rose alive again from the grave. He truly knows the darkness you face and your painful difficulty – and He cares deeply. To take His hand is to be led into eternal LIFE and to gain an awesome relationship with the one true God who desperately loves you. If you'd like to take that open hand, open your heart to Jesus Christ right now and pray - invite Him in, confess your sin, ask for God's forgiveness and you will begin a new life. He will come into your heart to save and heal and help - and eventually He'll welcome you into His home - heaven. Read Romans 3:23, 6:23, 10:9,10, Ephesians 2:8,9, Rev 3:20, and John 3:16.