

The Disciple Jesus Loved

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- [0 : 0 0] 30 plus years of service, combat medals, citations, the only man to shoot down three enemy planes in the last 40 years, yet you can't get a promotion.
- You won't retire, and despite your best efforts, you refuse to die. The commander scowls. You should be at least a two-star admiral by now.
- Yet here you are, Captain. Why is that? Standing before this naval commander is Captain Pete Mitchell, the actor Tom Cruise in Top Gun Maverick.
- And don't worry, I don't need to give a spoiler alert. I simply want to say that this is the opening scenes of this movie.
- And the question is, why has Captain Pete Mitchell never been promoted despite his years of service? Later, he will tell another commander who has assigned him on a mission, A top gun fighter pilot is not what I do.
- [1 : 3 5] It's who I am. Do you know who you are? Okay.
- Yeah. How's that? You want me to start over? No. In my first church in the mountains of North Carolina, I greeted a young man after the service at the door with the question, Who are you?
- He was a visitor. How's that? And he just stared blankly back at me.
- He came back to our next worship service, and he apologized. He said, I think I left you wondering why I weirded out at that moment.
- And I said, Frankly, you did. And he said, Well, quite philosophically, I had an existential moment, meaning it suddenly passed before me, that I did not know who I was.
- [3 : 1 0] You asked the question in such a way that I didn't think that you wanted to know who I was as a visitor to the church, but who am I? Why do I exist?
- What's my identity in this world? What's my identity?
- Were that possible? You understand that we've got an identity crisis worldwide. There are people that are asking the question, and there are people that are making identity statements to say, How do we identify ourselves?
- Do we identify ourselves by race and color? Do I identify myself by gender? Do I identify myself by my ideology or my philosophy, my beliefs?
- Do I identify myself by my beliefs? Do I identify myself by my beliefs? Do I identify myself by my beliefs? Why is this message this morning important?
- [4 : 4 6] Do I identify myself by my beliefs? Your identity matters. Your identity matters. Your identity matters before God. Your identity matters in that there's some.
- And I want to really direct this statement particularly to teens, students, and young adults.
- Because there is a campaign for you to identify with a tribe or a group that is so identified itself by gender, by race, by ideology.
- So some this morning are searching. Some of you are beginning the search or have had thoughts about who am I?

What is my identity? And you're beginning to look at these other groups and say, I bear some of those characteristics but not all those characteristics. Maybe I'll be there. My friends are there. And I'll identify with that group.

[5 : 59] So some of you are in a search. Why is this message important for you? To tune in, lean in, hear God's word. Because if your identity is apart from being a son or a daughter in God, a Christian through Jesus Christ, you'll never stop that search.

It's not a fulfilling search with an end. You'll always struggle with that identity.

Some of you this morning, though, are the polar opposite. You'd like to shake your identity. Some of you, I know that I've been doing some work in Govan, and in that community and that church plant, and they would love to shake the old labels of drug addict or alcoholic or the man who left his wife because of adultery.

It's important that you know your real identity this morning, that you don't have to worry anymore about shaking that old label, that old identity that other people have put upon you when you accept your identity in God.

So instead of searching, instead of shaking, you can experience shalom. As it says right here, verse 3, grace, mercy, and peace will be with us from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father, Son, in truth and love.

[7 : 52] If you want that, then first and foremost, recognize your identity in God's sight through Jesus Christ as his follower.

The big idea this morning. John, the author, the preacher, an elder in the church, speaks to us and he says, you will identify and be identified by who you walk with.

Who you walk with has an impact upon your identity. Or as Bernard of Clairvaux said many, many years ago, you grow to resemble the things you love most.

And that's where we're going. And I want you to see three things. I want you to see, number one, very quickly, what is the greatest characteristic of Christian identity?

You know, do I need to change my hair to pink or purple? Is that the first thing that I do? Do I need to get a facial tattoo to be so identified? What do I need to do to demonstrate what's the chief characteristic of Christian identity?

[9 : 32] Secondly, I want you to see the greatest challenge because it is challenged, your Christian identity. And then third, I want you to see the gospel.

I want you to see the great change that takes place for Christian identity. First of all, what's the greatest characteristic of Christian identity?

Let me ask you, rhetorically, what do you say is the greatest characteristic of Christianity?

Let me ask you a different way. We are in partake. We're surrounded by a community and culture.

If we could overhear what this culture around us, where we worship, our center of worship and practice of our faith, if we could eavesdrop, what would you want them to hear as the primary characteristic of this church and this congregation?

[10 : 49] These are people that blah, blah, blah. I suspect that if you're like most, you would say truth. Truth.

They're people of the book. They stand on the word. They believe the word. They obey the word. They're people of truth. Well, John wrote and in this epistle this very short letter that was circulated to all the church, John was as a writer, he wrote more than the other gospel writers and he had, he used the word truth 45 times in his writings to the congregation and that's a lot.

love. But he used the term love 80 times and it's a prominent theme.

It's a two-sided love like the two wings of an airplane. He said it's a receiving love. It's a love that identifies itself by having an object of its affection in God.

I am loved. In fact, John is known as in John 13, 23 and elsewhere toward, I will say, the latter time of his being a disciple, a follower of Jesus Christ during Christ's public ministry in time on earth.

[12 : 43] John was first identified as John, the brother of James. John and James, they appear in tandem. But then, about halfway through his gospel in John 13, something changes.

He's only identified as the one whom Jesus loved. God. He received God's love and he emphasizes that in all of his writings.

But what's more, he emphasizes giving love. He would say, don't say that you, in 1 John, he would say in essence, he would say, don't say that you love God and are loved by God if you don't give love.

Don't say that you've received God's love and you're a vessel of God's love unless it's going out and you're giving love. So receiving love and giving love, he says, it's a prominent thing, he says, that is the chief characteristic, the chief characteristic of our Christian identity, of the Christian church.

Let's stop right there. Is that your identity? Would people say that about you? And I challenge you, I've got a 40th anniversary coming up this month and I'll make a deal with you.

[14 : 25] If someone else says, I will do it, then I will do it. All right? I will ask my wife, Wendy, on our 40th anniversary celebration, am I loving?

Am I more loving than I was last year? Not do you love me? And not do I love you, but am I loving?

Am I a loving person to you, to the kids, to neighbors, to fellow worshipers, my brothers and sisters?

Would you ask that? That's a great identifier of your identity as a Christian. John says in his gospel in chapter 13, not only in verse 23, 3, where he says he's one of his disciples whom Jesus loved, but he says in verse 34 and 35, this is Jesus.

A new commandment I give to you that you love one another, just as I have loved you. You also are to love one another.

[15 : 46] By this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another. It's the primary characteristic of a disciple.

A disciple being a follower of Jesus. I'm with him. I'm identified with him. He is my rabbi.

He is my master. He is my savior. He is my Lord. He loves. He loves me. He loves others. I love him.

I love others. It's the chief characteristic. Are we doing that? Are we living out that identity?

Are we living and reflecting in this community, in this culture, in our world? Yes, we need truth. We must have truth.

[16 : 42] In fact, I have not said anything untruthful that is not based on truth this morning. It's all based on hearing. But are you identified as a person, a Christian, a disciple by your love?

God we should demonstrate in our evangelism, even in our apologetics, our witness to a watching world, be it the campus of the university, be it in our home, be it in the classroom, be it in the workplace, be it in our neighborhood, that we're just like a people in love.

life. I've got to go this week and get a car alignment.

Now, I got my car aligned six weeks ago. I took my car, I called a quick fit, I called actually three quick fits because they're so incredibly busy.

And so I rehearsed this three times. Yeah, what do you need? What's happening with your car?

[18 : 01] Well, it's making this sound when I go over a speed bump or I hit a pothole. And they said, well, does it sound more like or clunk?

And I said, it sounds more like clunk. He says, that's your springs. I'm like, a man that knows his sounds.

So I go in and they replace not one but both springs and they do an alignment. And he says, I've aligned your car, but it's perfectly aligned for the motorways.

And I suspect the neighborhood and the routes that you frequently take has a number of potholes. And I'm like, does it ever? Boy, I have to be, I'm a great navigator around those potholes, but I still can't avoid them all.

And he says, well, bring it back in six weeks because it's going to need to be realigned for the potholes. And I'm like, well, that's a new one on me. So I'm going to go this week and I'm going to get alignment because there are potholes out there.

[19 : 19] I want to speak just a moment. If the chief characteristic of Christian identity is love, it has potholes ahead.

There are challenges if we are to stay aligned with Jesus Christ, who models love to us, who calls us over and over again, particularly through John, the writer, love one another.

Then we need to know that there are challenges. It's not easy. It's difficult. And one pothole can knock us out of alignment.

And I want to talk to you about two potholes very quickly. Now, John, the writer, didn't have potholes. I think they might have had ditches.

They didn't have cars. They didn't have motorways. They walked. And so John, in this letter, talks in verse 4 about children walking.

[20 : 37] He speaks, in verse 6, walk according to his commandments. In verse 7, he says, many deceivers have gone out into the world.

In other words, they've left the path. They were walking with us and with Jesus, but they've gone out now. They've left the church. They've left the building.

They've left the way. And then he says in verse 9, everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ.

And that word abiding is parallel with walking. It's a close walk. So the image of John is this. In this life, there is a path that Jesus is walking with us and we're walking with Jesus on this path.

And this path, wherever it leads with Jesus, we're to follow. We're not to lag behind. We're not to get off the path. And we're not to run ahead.

[21 : 51] That's to be out of alignment where Jesus is going and where he tells and directs us to go. There's two potholes.

First of all, there's ignorance. The pothole of ignorance. We're ignorant of what the pothole is. Now, I've gotten, I've had, I've been rescued by our pastor calling before in dire straits because I had a tire blow out coming back from Helensboro and the church plant there in a roundabout.

I didn't, I didn't see the pothole and smash and it burst my tire. I was ignorant of that pothole.

In verse six, he says, this is love. Now, remember, that's our chief characteristic. So you want to know, where's my direction? Where, where's the definition? Where, how do I know what love is?

To both experience it and receive it and then also to give it. He says, and this is love, that we walk according to his commandments. This is the commandment, just as you've heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it.

[23 : 09] He doesn't want us to be ignorant of the commandments. He doesn't want us to fall into the pothole of not knowing the way that we're to walk.

A couple observations. Number one, if you look at the languages behind this, the word for commandment is in the singular, not plural.

At first glance, you're like me. Your reflex is to say the Ten Commandments or the many, many words and directives of Jesus Christ. All of those commandments.

No, it's one. Remember when I read in John 13, 34, a new commandment, singular, I give to you that you love one another just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

He puts it differently but the same, it's a little more full in 1 John chapter 3 verse 23. And this is his, and that's Jesus, commandment that we believe in the name of his son, Jesus Christ, and love one another.

[24 : 39] He doesn't separate them. That's the commandment. Believe in Jesus, love one another. That's it. Now, yes, there are other commandments, but he's saying this is the great characteristic.

Don't be ignorant that all the commandments distill down into this. Just as he commanded us, whoever keeps his commandments abides or walks in God and God in him.

And by this, we know that he, Jesus, abides or walks with us by the spirit whom he has given us. He also doesn't want us to be ignorant, to believe that, well, it's a command, and I have Jesus example of loving others, and now it's on me.

love it that John, who also had more than other gospel writers to say about the Holy Spirit, says, it's by the power of the spirit that is at work within you.

Let me give you a quick test. I've got to rush on. It's called the Love Three Challenge. Make a triangle. at the top of that triangle, I want you to think about how easy or think about loving someone, loving another person, a loved one already.

[26 : 24] Think about loving them, family member, neighbor, workmate, somebody that you already love. Think about loving them. Added level of difficulty, is the difficult person.

Another point of the triangle. A little hard because they are in your mind a difficult person. But it's a challenge. You're to love them.

Point number three, your enemy. You probably would never say I hate them, but you do. You probably never say I wish that they were gone, but you do wish that.

love them. You've probably justified and rationalized in your mind why you are not required to love them. You know, we redefine neighbor, we redefine enemy.

To the degree at either one of those points that you're experiencing a challenge to love, it's beyond my capacity, it's beyond my ability, it's beyond me.

[27 : 29] I can't love them. It's too hard at that moment. It's when Jesus says, in your walk with me, I command you to love them as I love them.

Draw, even with a plea and a prayer, upon the Holy Spirit. Teach me how to love them. And the gospel is, he will teach you how to love them by reminding you once again how he loves you and the price that he paid.

Number two potholes in verse nine, and that was where I read the ones that go on ahead, that leave us and go on ahead, the progressives, that's pothole number two called arrogance.

And let me just say that arrogance is something that John, our writer, is very familiar with. I won't turn there now, but in Mark nine, John, still identified as John, stops a man who is not identified with the twelve, but he is identified with Jesus.

He is casting out demons in the name of Jesus, which he believes in, and he's seeing that power at work. And John goes to him and he says, stop it, stop it, stop it.

[28 : 56] And he goes and he brags about it to Jesus. Maybe thinking, but in Mark 10, we read that John and James came to him and said, hey Lord, we've got the chain of command for heaven figured out.

I want to sit on the left, my brother wants to sit on the right, but you know what? It really doesn't matter, just as long as it's the two of us. By the way, I should do that because you saw in Mark 9, just earlier, I'm shutting people down.

I'm fixing them. I'm controlling them because they don't think exactly like I think. They're not identified exactly with our tribe, our church, our denomination, that they believe in Jesus.

And Jesus says, don't. Anybody that gives a cup of cold water shows even the smallest act of love and kindness, they're for us, as if they're one with us.

Now, this arrogance, a tip, a tipping of the cards as to where it comes from is in verse 7. He says, many deceivers have gone out into the world, they've left us.

[30 : 12] They are those that do not confess the coming of Jesus in the flesh. This is not the birth of Christ. This is the return of Christ. He says, their eyes have fallen off of Jesus, and it's more on their ministry, their own walk, their way, their life, rather than living their lives with their eyes on Jesus, living their life in light of eternity, living their light, beholding, living their life beholding the glory and the beauty.

my Savior. And out of that flows love. He says, no, they've taken their eyes off that, and their eyes are solely on this world. And it's had an impact.

Lastly, the great change for Christian identity. John was not always identified as the disciple whom Jesus loved.

He was first known, and we see this in Mark 3, when the disciples are listed. And you have Peter, who will be the rock identified.

And these lists of fishermen are listed, and then you have John and James in the moniker of the sons of thunder.

[31 : 51] John was thunder boy. He was thunder boy when they were not well treated or received by the Samaritans.

Another tribe, another people group, and that identity. And he said, Lord, shall we call down an airstrike on these guys? Passionate, ambitious, impulsive, impatient, thunder boy.

But now, if you look in the footnotes, and I always recommend that you do, in verse 23 of John 13, one of his disciples whom Jesus loved, he's so humble, he's writing this, he won't even identify himself by name.

The ambition has changed into humility. Who are you? I'm just a disciple. That Jesus loves. Well, yeah, but weren't you son of thunder?

Yeah, but he loves me. If you look in the footnote, it says, in the bosom of Jesus, he's the disciple in the bosom, he was reclining at table at Jesus, he was the disciple whom Jesus loved in the bosom of Jesus.

[33 : 24] Now, for scholars and students of the Bible, which to some degree hopefully we all are, this afternoon, take John 13, 23, in the bosom of Jesus and do a compare and contrast to John's gospel, chapter 1, verse 18, where we see Jesus in the bosom of his father.

father. What changed John? What changed John so that he could so decrease from thunder boy to simply saying the rest of my life and all of my writings to the end of my days I want to be known as the disciple whom Jesus loved.

Well, scholars say two things. Number one, they said, can you imagine the impact of three years of life in the bosom of Jesus?

They say, speculate, that John drew so near, I mean, he's on top of Jesus in reclining at the table at each meal each day so that he could hear every word that fell from Jesus.

And secondly, he was the only eyewitness of Jesus' crucifixion on the cross. The only eyewitness, the only disciple that is mentioned.

[35 : 12] He appears with Jesus' mother, Mary, at his side. And Jesus speaks to him, seeing him in the crowd, speaks to him, and he says, to the disciple that Jesus loved, John records, woman, this is your son, son, this is your mother.

And for the rest of his life, John would lovingly care for the mother of Jesus because he saw Jesus' love.

And he experienced the power of that love. He would hear from the cross, forgive them, the Roman soldiers and others as they would crucify him and mock him.

He saw that it was love that held him on the cross, not nails. the cross. I'll end as John would believe would have ended.

John is writing here in 2 John. He's writing a little bit in code. He is identifying the church and us Christians, the congregation differently than we've ever read identified in the scriptures.

[36 : 47] He says in verse 1, the elder, that's John, to the elect lady, that's the church. And her children, that's you.

That's me. And in the end, he says, when he signs off the letter, the children of your elect sister greet you. Because it was a persecuted church.

Persecution had begun. John is writing this letter to the Ephesian church where he is presiding and serving a church of Paul.

And we understand that he was so old that he had to eventually be carried forward to preach. And as he aged, he was no longer able to give a fuller sermon like I've done this morning, but he's only able to say, remember the commandment, this new commandment to love one another.

And then it was reduced to love one another and then it was reduced to one last word, love. Imagine a one word sermon, but may we hear that and both receive it and give it as God's people, for that is our Christian identity.

[38 : 17] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, Father, I do ask that you would this day, by the power of your experience, by the power of the Spirit and our experience in observing Jesus Christ and our experience of receiving your love, that we would become known as a congregation that identifies with your love and we come to be identified as a people that love one another and others.

To this end, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.