

The Apostle John

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Today I thought we'd talk about the Apostle John. Now, several other times I've told you some true stories from the New Testament part of the Bible which had John in them, haven't I? But at those times John wasn't what you'd call the main character in the stories, was he? No. Instead, someone else was the main character, and John just happened to be there. Well, I thought that today we'd tell the stories using John himself as the main character. That way we can see what we can know from the Bible specifically about John. Okay?

First of all, though, I need to make something clear. There are 2 important men in the New Testament whose names are John. One is John the Baptist whose parents were the priest Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth and who was a cousin of Jesus. I've told you about John the Baptist before, haven't I? But the other "John" is the Apostle John. ("Apostle" means someone who is sent, and John was one of the men that Jesus sent out to tell people about how to be saved.) Anyway, it is the Apostle John that we will be talking about today. (By the way, it seems as if at least part of the time that the Apostle John had earlier been a follower of John the Baptist.)

Okay then. what do we know about the Apostle John? Well, John had a brother whose name was James. The Bible always says James' name first, "James and John", so perhaps James was older than John. But since today we're talking mainly about John, I'm going to say John's name first, "John and James".

Well, John and James were the sons of a man whose name was Zebedee, and their mother's name was Salome. (She was not the girl Salome who danced in the story of John the Baptist!) John, James, and their father Zebedee were all fishermen, Now, it seems that John and his family weren't just poor fishermen trying to get enough to keep them alive. No. The Bible speaks of servants that they had hired, that their mother Salome had enough so that she could help Jesus and His disciples, and that at least later John seems to have had a home of his own,

Anyway, John, James, and their father Zebedee were fishermen, and they lived way up at the north end of the Sea of Galilee. Now, the Sea of Galilee is actually a big, deep lake up in the upper part of the land of Israel. The sea of Galilee is full of fish and is very important, and at the time of John, it had nine cities around it. Oh, it may be a little confusing, because in the Bible the Sea of Galilee has 3 other names! It was also called the Lake of Gennes'areth, the Sea of Tiberias, and the Sea of Chin'nereth!! But we're just going to call it the Sea of Galilee. Okay? Galilee was the name of the top part of the land of Israel at that time, and this great, big lake was in that part of the land, hence the name "the Sea of Galilee".

So, John and his brother James were fishermen on the Sea of Galilee. They would catch fish and sell them. And they had partners in this fishing business. Their partners were Peter and his brother Andrew. (You've heard of Peter and Andrew before, haven't you?)

Well, one day after they had been fishing all night, John and James and Peter and Andrew brought their boats to shore and began washing their fishing nets. And who should come along then but Jesus! Yes, Jesus was standing there by the Sea of Galilee, and He was talking to the people, teaching them about God. But the people were all crowding around Jesus,

Well, Jesus saw the two fishing boats there at the shore, so he got into Peter's boat and asked him to shove it out a little way into the water. Then Jesus sat down in the boat and taught the people from there. That way more people could see Jesus as He talked and be better able to hear Him, couldn't they?

Well, when Jesus was through talking, He said to Peter, "Go out into the deep waters and put your nets down to catch fish."

Peter said to Jesus, "Master, we worked hard all night and didn't catch anything, but since you say so, we'll do it."

Then Peter and Andrew took the boat out to where the water was deep and let down their nets -- and what do you think happened? Why, the nets got so full of fish that the nets began to break! (That was a miracle, wasn't it?!) So Peter and Andrew called out to John and James to come help them! John and James got in their boat and went out there, and they all began pulling the fish into their boats. And both boats got so full of fish that they almost sank! And John and James and Peter and Andrew were all astonished at this miracle.

Jesus said to Peter and Andrew, "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." And right away they left their fishing nets and followed Jesus.

And John and James were in their boat with their father Zebedee, and they were mending their nets. And Jesus called out to John and James, too, And right away John and James left the boat and their father and followed Jesus.

Well, after that John and the others were with Jesus. They were with Him as He traveled around teaching about God and performing many miracles. Jesus called other men to follow Him, too. There were Matthew and Philip and Nathaniel and others. Many other people would follow Jesus and listen to Him, but John and 11 other men were specially chosen by Jesus. We call these 12 men His 12 disciples or apostles. Disciple means a follower or student of somebody, and apostle (as I said before) means someone

who is sent out.

John and the other 11 disciples were with Jesus when He fed the 5000 people with just 2 fish and 5 little loaves of bread. John and the others were with Jesus when He walked on top of the water during a storm. They were with Jesus during another storm when Jesus told the wind and waves to calm down, and the storm went away. John and the others were with Jesus when He healed many sick people. And John and the others walked with Jesus all over the land of Israel as He taught people about God and performed many miracles.

Now, John, James, and Peter seem to have been special even among the 12 apostles.

When Jairus' daughter died, Jesus only took the 3 of them (John, James, and Peter) into the room with Him when He made the girl alive again.

Also, one day Jesus went up onto a high mountain, taking only John, Peter and James with Him. Suddenly Jesus was changed! His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became a bright, bright white! Yes, John, James, and Peter saw this; they saw Jesus, the Son of God, in His glory! And then suddenly Moses and Elijah were there on the mountain with Jesus and were talking with Him! Jesus, Moses, and Elijah talked about when Jesus was soon going to die on the cross and then be alive again.

Well, John, and James and Peter were scared! Peter blurted out, "Lord, it is good for us to be here! Let's put up 3 shelters. One for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah!" Peter really didn't know what he was saying! And while he was still speaking, a bright cloud came and surrounded all of them, and that scared John, Peter, and James even more! And then a voice came out of the cloud! The voice said, "This is my much loved Son. I am very pleased with Him. Listen to Him!" Who was that speaking out of the cloud? Yes, it was God the Father, and He was talking about Jesus, who is God the Son!

Well, when they heard this voice, John and the 2 others got even more scared, and they fell down on their faces onto the ground! But then Jesus came over and touched them and said to John, Peter, and James, "Get up. Don't be afraid." And John and the other 2 disciples looked up -- and only Jesus was there! Yes, Moses and Elijah were gone! And Jesus wasn't shiny anymore!

Then Jesus said to John, Peter, and James, "Don't tell anyone about this until I have been raised from the dead." So John and Peter and James only just talked about this among the 3 of themselves. And they talked about what "rising from the dead" meant. They didn't understand yet that the reason that Jesus, God the Son, came to earth as a human was so that He could die for our sins, but that He wouldn't stay dead.

Now Jesus had earlier sent John and the other 11 apostles out to teach people about

the kingdom of God. And at that time, Jesus had given them the power to perform miracles by which they could heal people. John and the other 11 apostles healed sick people and crippled people and cast out demons. They would do this in the name of Jesus. They couldn't have done the miracles by themselves unless Jesus had let them. Right?

Well, one day John said to Jesus, "We saw a man casting out demons in your name. We told him to stop doing this, because he wasn't one of us." You see, John thought only he and the other 11 apostles should do this.

But Jesus told John, "Don't stop this man. In fact, whoever does things in My name is not against us. He is for us. And if anyone even gives someone who belongs to me a cup of water in My name, he will be rewarded." Jesus meant that if we help a Christian who needs help in the name of Jesus, that some way God will reward us. The reward may be something good will happen to us here on earth, or it may be that we will have a reward in heaven for having helped another Christian in the name of Jesus.

By the way, Jesus gave John and James the nickname of Bo-an-er'ges, which means "the Sons of Thunder". I'm not sure why Jesus did this.

Well, after John had been with Jesus about 3 years, it was getting to be near Passover time. (I've told you about Passover before, haven't I?) And it was getting near to the time for Jesus to go to Jerusalem where He would die on the cross for our sins. Jesus and John and the other 11 apostles had been in Galilee, so they started walking down to Judea where Jerusalem is. Of course, they would have to go through Samaria to get to Jerusalem. And Jesus sent messengers ahead of him to a village in Samaria to get things ready for Him when He got there. But the people in that village didn't welcome Jesus. When John and James saw this, they said to Jesus, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven onto them and destroy them?" But Jesus just turned to John and James and sort of scolded them for saying that. And then they went on to a different village.

One of the days as Jesus and His disciples were walking through Samaria on their way to Jerusalem, there was a crowd around Jesus. And Zaccheus was there and wanted to see Jesus, too. So Zaccheus climbed up into a sycamore tree so that he could see Jesus. You remember that story about Zaccheus, don't you?

Now, Jesus didn't travel with just John and the other 11 apostles. No. Often many other people traveled with Him, people who wanted to hear Him teach and be close to Him and even help Him. Why, if Jesus were here on earth today I would want to be with Him, wouldn't you?! There were also women who sometimes traveled with them, helping them. John's mother Salome was one of those women.

One day Salome and her two sons, John and James, went up to Jesus, and they asked for a strange favor from Him. Evidently Salome did the talking. She said, "Please let

my two sons sit on your right side and your left side in your kingdom." She and John and James wanted for the 2 brothers to be especially important, didn't they?

Well, Jesus said to them, "You don't know what you're asking! Can you go through the same troubles I'll have?"

They said, "Yes, we can."

Jesus then said to them, "Well, you will have troubles. But I can't say that you can sit on my right or left. Those places belong to the ones for whom my Father has prepared them." Of course, Jesus meant God the Father.

Well, the ten other disciples heard what John and James wanted, and they got upset at them! But Jesus called them together and said, "The rulers of people boss the people around. But you aren't to be like that."

He said, "No. Whoever wants to become important among you must be like a servant. He must be like a servant to everyone. Why, I didn't come to have people serve Me! Instead, I came to serve and to give my life to save many."

That's something we should remember, isn't it? We need to do things for other people and not expect them to always be doing things for us. Right?

Well, Jesus and John and the others finally got to Jerusalem. And that is when Jesus rode the donkey into the city of Jerusalem and the people all waved palm branches and shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!" That day is what we call Palm Sunday, isn't it?

A couple of days later Jesus gave a long talk on the Mount of Olives, just outside of Jerusalem. He told about when He would come back again someday.

Then a couple of days after that it was time to get ready for Passover. So Jesus said to John and Peter, "Go and get things ready for us to eat on Passover."

Well, it was always very crowded in Jerusalem at Passover time, since many, many people went to Jerusalem at that time. So John and Peter asked Jesus, "Where should we do that?"

Jesus said, "Go into the city, and as you enter, you'll see a man carrying a jar of water. Follow him, then say to the owner of the house he goes to, 'The Teacher says my time is near, and I'm going to celebrate Passover at your house. Where is the guest room?'"

Jesus said, "Then he will show you a large upper room that is all ready. Get things

ready for dinner there."

So John and Peter went into the city. They saw the man, just as Jesus had said they would, and they followed him, as Jesus had told them to do. When the man went into a house, John and Peter asked the owner of the house what Jesus had told them to say. Then the owner of the house showed them the large upper room, and John and Peter got things ready for Passover.

In the evening Jesus with John and the other 11 disciples all went into this room. But then the 12 disciples began arguing among themselves about which of them was the greatest! Oops! What had Jesus told them before that people should be like if they wanted to be important? Yes, like a servant.

Now, people just wore sandals then, and the roads were just dirt roads. So, of course, their feet got dirty as they walked on those dirt roads. Usually a servant would wash their feet before dinner, but it would seem that there wasn't a servant there that night. So when the disciples began arguing about which of the 12 of them was the most important among them, Jesus, the most important person in that whole room, got up from dinner. Jesus took off his outer robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, got a basin and poured water into it, and then Jesus, began washing their feet!

I'll bet that then they were ashamed of what they'd been arguing about, don't you?! Jesus, the Son of God, their great teacher, was washing their feet as a servant would! What a good lesson Jesus was teaching not only to them but to us, too. Right? And then again Jesus told them that they should be like servants, but He also told them that someday they would be very important in the Kingdom of God. He was talking about when He comes back someday to be King over everything and everyone.

Well, after that they ate the Passover dinner. And while they were eating, Jesus said that one of them would betray Him! They were all very surprised (except for Judas, of course) and wondered who it would be! Well, John was sitting next to Jesus. So Peter motioned to John and said, "Ask Jesus which one He means."

Then John leaned back against Jesus and said to Him. "Lord, which of us is it?"

Jesus said, "The one to whom I'll give this piece of bread after I've dipped it into the dish."

Then Jesus took a piece of bread, dipped it into the dish (probably into the gravy), and gave it to Judas. Then Judas left, though the other apostles didn't realize what he was going to do, that Judas was going to betray Jesus.

Then Jesus and the remaining 11 apostles finished their dinner. After dinner they went outside of Jerusalem to a place called the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus told 8 of the

disciples to sit down there while He went over a little way and prayed. Then Jesus took John and Peter and James and walked a little further on. Jesus said to these 3 disciples, "I'm very unhappy. Stay here and keep watch with me and pray for yourselves, too." Then Jesus went a little farther on and knelt down and prayed to God the Father. He knew that very soon He would be put on the cross and die there. And though Jesus is God, He is also a human, so He felt very distressed about what would happen to Him.

After Jesus had prayed a while, He got up and went back to where John, Peter, and James were -- and they were asleep. Jesus said, "Couldn't you watch with me for an hour? Get up and pray that you won't be tempted to do what you shouldn't do." He said, "Sometimes we want to do the right thing, but our bodies are weak. So pray."

Then Jesus went over and prayed to God the Father again. When He came back, He found John and Peter and James fast asleep again. They didn't know what to say to Him! Then Jesus went over and prayed some more to God the Father.

When Jesus came back to John and Peter and James this third time, He said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? That is enough. Get up! Here comes the one who is going to betray me."

Well, you know the rest of the story, don't you? Judas and a bunch of soldiers came. Jesus was arrested, and all of His disciples got scared and ran away. Then the soldiers took Jesus to the high priest for a trial. But then John and Peter followed Jesus to see what was going to happen.

Now, some way John knew the high priest, so John was allowed to go with Jesus to the high priest's house where He would be questioned, but Peter waited outside of the courtyard. When John saw Peter outside, John went up to the girl who was watching the gate and spoke to her. Then John brought Peter into the courtyard.

Jesus was later sent to the Roman governor Pilate for another trial. The priests, the leaders, and the people insisted to Pilate that Jesus should be killed. So Jesus was led outside of the city of Jerusalem to Golgatha (also called Calvary) where He was put on a cross. This was a very sad time.

Many of Jesus' friends followed Jesus and stood a ways off watching what was happening to Jesus. Among these friends were many women who had followed Jesus as He went from Galilee and had taken care of what He needed. Among these women were John's mother Salome and Mary Magdelene.

Jesus' mother Mary and John were also there near the cross. Jesus looked down from the cross at John and Mary, and He said to Mary, "Dear woman, there is your son." And then Jesus said to John, "There is your mother." He meant for John to take care of Mary. So after that John took Mary to his own home.

Well, Jesus died there on the cross, didn't He? And He was buried by being put in a cave, and a big, heavy stone was rolled over the doorway. And some of the women, including John's mother Salome and Mary Magdalene watched and saw where Jesus was buried.

But why was Jesus, the Son of God, letting this happen to Himself? Couldn't He have stopped them? Yes, of course, He could have. He could have called a whole army of angels if He'd wanted to! But why had Jesus left His glory in heaven and come as a human to earth? Yes, it was so that He could die for us and make it so that we could go to heaven someday and always be with Him. After all, we are all sinners, aren't we? But Jesus never sinned, so He died to save us from our sins if we just trust in Him.

But did Jesus stay dead? No, of course not! And that's what we celebrate on Easter, isn't it? So let's see if the Apostle John is also mentioned in the Easter story, okay?

Well, 3 days after Jesus died on the cross and was buried, early that Sunday morning, John's mother Salome, Mary Magdalene, and some other women went to the cave where Jesus had been buried. Now, it was the custom that when someone was buried that special spices would be put on his body. So the women had special spices with them that they wanted to put on Jesus' body. And as they walked along, they wondered how they'd be able to roll away that big, heavy stone from the doorway of the cave. But when they got there, they saw that the stone was already rolled away! But, oh dear, Jesus' body wasn't there!

Then Mary Magdalene just turned around and ran to where John and Peter were and told them, "They've taken Jesus away, and we don't know where they've put Him!"

Well, John and Peter got right up and ran to the cave! It sounds as if John were younger, but at any rate, John ran faster than Peter and got to the cave first. John stopped and bent down and just looked into the cave. John could see the cloths that had been wrapped around Jesus' body. In fact, the cloth that had been around His head was folded and lying there separately from the rest. But Jesus Himself wasn't there!

By this time, Peter had gotten there, and Peter just ran right into the cave. Then John went into the cave, too. John saw the cloths but no Jesus, and then the Bible says that John believed, though he still didn't understand about rising from the dead.

But that's what had happened, wasn't it? Jesus had risen from the dead! He was alive again, and He stayed alive! And later that day Jesus actually came Himself to John and 9 of the other disciples as they were eating dinner and talked to them. (Of course, Judas who had betrayed Jesus wasn't there, but Thomas wasn't there either.) And John and the other 9 disciples then believed that Jesus was really alive again. And they were so happy! And a week later Jesus again came and talked to John and all 10 of the other

disciples (Thomas was there this time).

Now, Jesus had said for the disciples to go back up to Galilee, and they would see Him there. So John and the other 10 disciples all went to Galilee. And while they were waiting to see Jesus again, one night some of them, including John and Peter, decided to go fishing out on the Sea of Galilee. After all, many of them were fishermen. So they got into a boat and went out on the water. They fished and fished, but they didn't catch any fish at all.

Early in the morning someone was on the shore, and he called to them, "Friends, do you have any fish?"

They called back, "No."

Now, John and the others didn't realize it, but it was Jesus there on the shore! And Jesus called back again to them, "Throw your net out on the right side of the boat and you'll find some fish."

They threw the net out on the right side -- and the net got so heavy with fish that they couldn't pull it in!

Then John suddenly knew Who had spoken to them! John said, "It's the Lord!"

Well, Peter didn't wait! He just jumped into the water to go see Jesus! But John and the others came in the boat, pulling that heavy net full of fish with them.

Jesus already had a fire going on the beach with some fish on it and had some bread. They all ate breakfast, then Jesus took Peter aside and talked to him a few minutes. Well, John had followed them, and Peter turned around and saw John and asked Jesus, "What about John?"

And Jesus said, "You just do as I told you; follow me." In other words, Peter was to mind his own business!

Well, as you know, a while later Jesus went back to heaven.

Now, the true stories that I just told you about John were all from the first 4 books of the New Testament, what we call the 4 Gospels -- the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Yes, the Apostle John wrote the Gospel of John! And do you want to know something interesting? Why, in the Gospel of John, the Apostle John never uses his own name! No! He will just say, "the other apostle" or "the apostle Jesus loved" or something like that. But we know from the other 3 Gospels that this person is actually John.

Well, after Jesus went back to heaven, the disciples began preaching about Jesus to

many people. We hear about this in the book of the Acts of the Apostles (this is usually called just Acts). Once John and Peter were going together to the temple, and they saw a man lying at one of the gates of the temple. This man had been born crippled, and each day he was brought there so he could beg for money.

John and Peter looked at this poor beggar. Peter said, "We don't have any money to give you, but I can give you something. In the name of Jesus Christ, get up and walk."

And Peter took him by his right hand to help the beggar up, and immediately the crippled beggar was well! And he started jumping around and walking! How happy he was! And the people at the temple saw him, and they went to John and Peter. And John and Peter used this miracle to tell the people about Jesus and that Jesus was alive again and told them to believe in Jesus and be saved from their sins.

Now, you'd think everyone would be happy for the man who wasn't crippled anymore, wouldn't you? But the leaders and priests weren't! After all, they had been the ones who'd gotten Jesus killed, so they didn't want John and Peter telling the people that Jesus was alive again! So the leaders had John and Peter arrested and put in jail. The next day the leaders told John and Peter not to talk about Jesus anymore. But John and Peter said to them, "Should we listen to you rather than to God? We have to talk about the things we have seen and heard."

Well, John and the other 10 apostles did many miracles and healed many people. And lots of people began believing in Jesus and were saved from their sins. And people came from all around Jerusalem to be healed. But, of course, the leaders didn't like this; they didn't like it that so many people were starting to follow Jesus, to believe in Him. So they arrested all of the apostles this time (including, of course, John) and put them all in prison. But guess what? The angel of the Lord came that night and took them out of the prison! And they went back to the temple the next day and were preaching about Jesus again!

In the morning the high priest and the leaders sent for John and the other apostles, but the soldiers told them that though the prison was still locked, the apostles weren't in it but were at the temple preaching. So the high priest had soldiers bring John and the other apostles to them, and he said to the apostles, "Didn't I tell you not to teach about Him anymore?" But John and Peter and the others just said again, "We need to obey God rather than men." After all, Jesus, the Son of God, had told them to go tell people about how to be saved by believing in Jesus, hadn't He? Yes, we always need to do what God tells us to do.

Well, later the leaders and Saul of Tarsus (who later became the Apostle Paul) began persecuting those who believed in Jesus, so many of the believers moved away from Jerusalem. A man named Philip went to Samaria. Philip told the Samaritans about Jesus, and many of the Samaritans began believing in Jesus. (I've told you about Philip

before, haven't I?) Back in Jerusalem the apostles heard that Samaritans were becoming believers, so they sent John and Peter to check on this, and they were happy to find out that this was true.

We don't really hear much about John himself after that, though he was probably with the other apostles as they worked in Jerusalem and probably other places as well. And John probably preached a lot about Jesus. However, John did write 3 letters that we have in the New Testament. In his first letter John told Christians how they could know they were saved. He also told them to love each other, to obey what God says, and to only believe what the Bible says about God, not just what some person might say. Then in his 2 little letters, John tells Christians to love each other and encourages them to be strong in their faith.

The last that we hear of the Apostle John is when he is a very old man, probably in his 90s. John is on a small island. It seems that he may have been sent there as a punishment for preaching about Jesus. Anyway, while John is there, a wonderful thing happens to him. The Lord Jesus in His glory appears to John! And Jesus tells John to write down 7 short letters to 7 different churches. After that Jesus reveals to John things that will happen before He, the Lord Jesus, comes back to earth again someday. Also, Jesus tells John some things that will happen after Jesus comes back to earth. And Jesus told John to write all of these things down, and John did. And we can read all of this in the very last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation. the book of revealing (showing) what will happen before, as, and after the Lord Jesus comes back in glory to be King of the whole world.

So that is what we know about John from the Bible. John, the brother of James. John, the son of Zebedee and Salome. John the beloved disciple. John, a "Son of Thunder". John an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. I hope you enjoyed hearing about him. I know I enjoyed telling you!