

The Apostle John: His Threefold Spiritual Identity

INTRODUCTION

I've heard this for many years. It's common to hear sincere believers talk about being spiritually dry, being burnt out, being disillusioned with God. But they love Jesus! I mean, they're going hard for God. The question you ask is, "How can that happen to someone who really loves Jesus?"

The very simple, but very accurate answer is that they're pursuing God and they're pursuing a ministry, which is good, but they're pursuing it with a wrong mindset. They're doing the right thing, but with a wrong spirit or a wrong mindset. It's not like they have a bad spirit; that's not what I mean. They're doing a right thing, but in a wrong way.

John the apostle was pursuing Jesus and ministry, which is a good thing. But he was doing it with a wrong mindset when he was a young man. He made significant changes that I'm going to point out, and he was transformed in a dynamic way.

"I MYSELF AM YOUR EXCEEDING GREAT REWARD"

Now, Abraham is called the father of our faith, and in Genesis 15:1, the Lord speaks to him. The word of the Lord comes to Abraham in a vision and says, "Abraham, do not be afraid. I am your shield, and I, Myself, am your exceeding great reward" (Gen. 15:1, paraphrased).

This is a remarkable thing. He has given Abraham many promises. If you study the book of Genesis, God promised Abraham great wealth, great fame, great impact. He says, "You are going to be famous and rich, and you are going to change human history. I promise you this reward; however, I, Myself, not your fame, not your ministry, I am your greatest reward. Those other things are My reward to you, but they are secondary rewards. I am the primary reward. I Myself am the great reward; relationship with Me will actually touch you and exhilarate you more than a powerful ministry."

So God says in Genesis 15:1, "I am your reward, Abraham."

Abraham says, "Yes, but Lord, You have promised me many other things."

The Lord says, "That is right, but do not forget, I am your exceedingly great reward."

Now when I talk about Jesus being our primary reward, what I'm talking about is the ability to feel the love of God. I'm talking about the ability to love Him back. I'm talking about opening the Bible and reading the Bible and your heart feeling exhilarated and fascinated by who Jesus is. That takes the operation of the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit will give us this dimension of the grace of God if we want it.

Let me say it again: We will feel the love of God more than that, or in addition to that, when we read the Bible. Instead of feeling bored, we will feel increasingly fascinated by Jesus. I don't mean every day is an awesome day, that's not what I mean, but I mean even a little of this will change your life. This is what I mean by Jesus

being your great reward, a reward greater than even an anointed ministry or favor in circumstances and favor in relationships, etc.

TWO DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF BLESSING

I want to talk about two different categories of God's blessing, of God's reward, from a biblical point of view.

Category number one is our primary reward. I'm just saying what I just said. Connecting with Jesus, His presence touching our heart, is our primary reward. Our secondary rewards are God's favor on relationships, God's favor on finance, God's favor on our ministries, God's favor giving us authority and impact in the lives of other people.

The problem is that people take their secondary rewards and make them their primary reward. The things that God meant to be important, but secondary, become number one, and when that happens there is a disconnect in our hearts with the Lord. I love the secondary rewards; I want the Lord to give me more money, more favor, more friends, more anointing, more everything. I love it, but I don't want to be confused with these glorious secondary rewards. I don't want to confuse them with the primary reward which is connection with Jesus—the ability to give love back to God and the ability to be fascinated with Jesus; when I open the Bible, when I read it, for the Spirit to stir my heart.

Let's look at John's life.

THE SON OF THUNDER

Mark 3:17. Now, we're going to apply this principle to the life of John the apostle. John is about twenty years old. Many think he was eighteen at this time. Let's just round it off and say twenty. He's a young apostle and the Lord calls him. At the very beginning of Jesus' ministry of three and a half years, He calls John. He names John and his brother James. He gives them an unusual name in Mark 3:17. Here's this twenty-year old guy. Jesus looks at him and says, "You are a son of thunder."

I'm just going to focus in on John right now, and not his brother. "John, you are a son of thunder." Of course, John doesn't know what this means. It's a prophecy. His friends probably said, "We get what that means!" because John had a thunderous personality in the flesh. Undoubtedly John thundered in his personality and his pride, which we're going to show you in a few minutes he did. He had thunderous pride. John had thunder in his personality in a wrong way, in a fleshly way—fear, bitterness, lust, pride, the things that are common to us all.

But the Lord is going to transform John from a son of thunder in his natural passions in a negative way, to a son of thunder in the Spirit in a positive way. When the Lord prophetically called him a son of thunder, this prophecy marked John's spirit.

My prayer is tonight that God will call some of you sons of thunder, men and women, young men, young women, that He would mark you and say, "I have called you to be a son of thunder in the Spirit. I want My love to thunder in your spirit, and I want your love for Me to thunder back to Me," because that is what John was to be known as in the years to come. He was known as the apostle of love. He was the one apostle above all the others who understood the thunder of God's love for him, and his life was so devoted to Jesus, it thundered back to heaven the love that the Spirit worked in John's heart back to him. John was the great lover of God. John was to the New Testament like what King David was to the Old Testament.

A PRAYER FOR REVELATION AND REVERBERATION

I want to be a son of thunder. I want the thunder of God's love to resound in my being; to echo through my being. I want it to transform how I see myself. "He loves me! He loves me! He loves me!"

I want more than that. I want with all my strength to love God. I want my whole being to thunder back in love for God. That's what you want. The Lord looks at this young twenty-year old. He says, "Young man, you may be a son of thunder in the flesh right now. You've got issues that are bothering you in your life, but let Me tell you, I have plans for you. You will be a son of thunder in the Spirit before this thing is over."

I am going to pray right now. Holy Spirit, I ask You that in this room You would mark young people and older people to be sons of thunder right now. I ask that You put your mark, Your seal on them. Give them a vision to receive the thunderous love, and to answer back in thunderous love to You, that this supernatural reality would reverberate within their very being. Release that vision; mark their spirit even now as You marked John in the days of old.

"THE DISCIPLE WHOM JESUS LOVED"

John 21:20 is the most revealing passage about John's life. First when we read it we think, "It is?" There's so much in John 21:20 about John the apostle's life, and this is the key to how he was transformed from a son of thunder in the natural, from thunderous pride, thunderous lust, bitterness, fear, whatever we struggle with as human beings, to be a man who thundered in the reality of the love of God.

John describes himself in three different ways. Again, you might not get it, but we will break it down in a minute.

In John 21:20, John writes, "Peter... saw the disciple whom Jesus loved" (Jn. 21:20a)—of course he's talking about himself. He could have written, "Peter saw John," but he did not. He wrote, "Peter saw the guy that God loves." That's what he called himself. "I am the guy that God loves."

"OK, John, that's an interesting name and title."

He says, "That's who I am! I am the one God likes!"

The truth is all of us are the guy whom God likes, but only a few people take hold of it. This was a reality to John; it wasn't just a cute phrase. The thunder of how God felt about him reverberated through his being. I mean, it dominated his inward thinking. The thunder of God changed the way John thought about himself.

Let me read the verse. "Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the last supper, and said, 'Lord, who is the one who betrays You?'" (Jn. 21:20).

DETERMINING HOW WE VIEW OURSELVES IN GOD

So, what's happening is that John is describing himself three different ways. He never says his name, but he gives three descriptions of how he views himself. Beloved, the way you see yourself in God is the most important thing about your spiritual life. What you believe God sees when He looks at you and what you believe about yourself and how God sees you will determine how you carry your heart with God, and how you will live in the years ahead.

THE WAYS IN WHICH JOHN VIEWED HIMSELF

John opens, pulls back the curtain, and lets us see how he views himself. So he calls himself, “The one whom God likes,” number one. Number two, he calls himself, “The young man who leans on God’s heart.” In other words, “I am the guy who likes God, too! He not only likes me, I like Him!” When John says, “The one who leaned on His heart,” he’s saying, “The one who is hungry to give himself fully to God.” He was talking about the anointing in his life to return wholehearted love back to God. That’s what he was talking about.

But then with the third phrase he says, “I was the one who said to Jesus, ‘Who is the one that betrays You?’” The context is the last supper. They’re sitting around the table and Jesus says, “Someone is going to betray Me.”

THE THINGS THAT PAIN GOD’S HEART

The whole room is quiet. All the apostles are there, because no one thinks Jesus is going to be betrayed by Judas. Now, 2,000 years later, we all know it’s Judas. When you look at a picture of the last supper, it’s always these elements. You’ve got the twelve guys and the dinner. Jesus has the halo, always. John is leaning on Him smiling and serene, always. The other guys are pretty non-descript. Judas is in the corner with a sinister look, with horns. You think, “Ah!” You always know who Judas is.

But 2,000 years ago, when it was happening, Judas was one of the people they least expected to betray Judas. They gave him the money because they trusted him so much. They didn’t think anyone would betray Him. They had a loyal family.

This betrayal wasn’t just a Bible fact, it was a tremendous pain to Jesus’ heart. This was one of His true friends, as we’ll see in a few moments. Jesus opened His heart to Judas as a friend, so that when He said, “Someone is going to betray Me,” this was a statement of pain that was heavy on Jesus’ heart. This wasn’t just a casual statement. He was saying, “I am in the greatest crisis of My life. I am going to the cross, but I have another thing that is paining My heart right now. I am deeply pained by this.”

John said, “I want to know what is paining Your heart. I want to know what is on Your heart. I want to know the secrets of Your heart.”

So when it says that John is the one who said, “Who betrays You?” John was saying, “I am the guy who went after the secrets of God’s heart. That is who I am. He loves me; I love Him; I live to get more of the secrets of His heart. That is why I am alive. That is my number-one passion in life. These three things are the passion of my life.”

THE AWE-INSPIRING RESUME OF JOHN

John wrote five books of the Bible. Most of you know that. He wrote 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, and then wrote the book of Revelation. He wrote four books and then the Gospel of John. That’s five. Many scholars believe he wrote the Gospel of John last. He was in his nineties and he wrote the Gospel of John.

The reason I’m saying that is that John 21:20, when you look it up, is one of the last verses of the last book that John wrote. In other words, that was John’s signature verse, summing up his entire life and his entire ministry. When he wrote John 21:20, he wasn’t just giving casual information, he was saying, “I have written five books of the Bible. I’m signing off. Here’s how I want you to remember me. Here’s my final statement about how I lived. I am the one whom God likes! I am the one who likes God. I lived to know the things that were burning

on His heart. I live to know the secrets of His heart. That's who I am; that's what I do. That's what my whole life was about."

Someone could say, "Yes, but John, you were one of the great apostles. You wrote the Bible! You led great revivals."

He says, "All of that is good, I love that, but that's not the most important thing about my life. These three things are clearly the things that are dearest to my heart." That is what John would say about his life. This one verse with these three statements tell us the most important life goals of John.

THE PRIMARY DREAM OF JOHN'S HEART

Why am I telling you this? I want to challenge you to make those three statements your life goals. These three statements represented the primary dream of John's heart. They weren't the only dream of John's heart, but the primary dream. This was the most important prayer request John had. If the Lord had appeared to John and said, "John, ask anything, anything! and I'll give it to you. I'll give you this billion dollars; I'll make you the most famous man in the earth; I'll do anything, what is it that you want?" John would say three things.

He would say, "I want to know more that You love. I want the anointing to love You back, to lean on Your heart. And I want to know the secrets of Your heart more than anything else." These would be the three answers John would give if Jesus appeared and said, "I will give you anything you want."

I want to ask you a question. If the Lord appeared to you tonight and said, "I will literally give you anything. You have one moment, one opportunity. It's the only time I will appear to you in this life. I will give you whatever you want," what would you say?

Some people would pick power and ministry so they would have worldwide impact. That's a good request. Others would pick fame or fortune. Others would pick romance; they would say, "Just give me that one girl, that one guy, and I will never ask again." Some would ask to have an unusual ability. Now I'm going too in-depth on this.

THE UNPARALLELED LIFE STORY OF JOHN THE APOSTLE

OK, I want you to take hold of this verse. My prayer is that you would get a vision to be a son of thunder, and that John 21:20 would actually be as important to you as it was to John. This is a funny way to say it, but John had one of the greatest resumes in all of history. I mean, think about what John accomplished and whom he knew. He knew Jesus' mother, Mary. As a matter of fact, Jesus was on the cross and He said, "John, she is now your mother." I mean, think about how famous Mary is in Church history. She is blessed; she is honored. Not only was she friends with John, she lived with John for decades. That was her son! Could you imagine having Mary as your mother? Whoa!

He hung out with the apostle Peter; he hung out with the apostle Paul. He led great revivals. He wrote five books of the Bible. One time Jesus was talking to the apostles and said to these guys, "You will have a throne in Israel in the age to come." Can you imagine if Jesus appeared to you and said, "You will have a throne in the age to come?" That is intense! All of us born-again believers are going to live in the age to come, but not everyone will have a throne. That is, millions might, but it's still a small percentage of redemptive history.

Then the ultimate: John has an open vision in Revelation 21. He sees the New Jerusalem. When he sees the New Jerusalem, it says in Revelation 21, he sees the names of the apostles on the foundation stones of the New Jerusalem. He's looking at this glorious 1,500-mile city, gold, diamonds, jasper, and saying, "Wow! Wow!" He looks at the foundation stone and sees the name, "John." "Whoa, my name is on the foundation stone!" I mean, imagine if it was you. What if I was telling the story about me? "I saw the great, the New Jerusalem; I saw 'Mike' on the foundation."

THE THUNDER THAT REVERBERATED IN HIS BEING

But when John wrote the final book he wrote, he didn't mention any of those things. He didn't say, "I'm the guy who wrote the Bible; I'm the guy who's going to have my name on the New Jerusalem." He didn't say, "I knew Peter, Paul, and Mary." He didn't mention any of those things. (The people laughing were born before 1983—so now we're even! OK). John mentions himself five times in the Gospel of John as the guy whom Jesus loved, the disciple Jesus loved. Every time he references himself, he's the one Jesus loves—five times! This was real to him. The thunder of God was reverberating, was echoing in his being. "I love you. I love you!"

This was John's whole dream, the way he viewed his life. "He loves me; He loves me; He loves me." Most people love Jesus, but the way they view their life is, "When is my ministry going to get big? Where do I fit? I want more money; I want to be more loved by people; I want more honor; I want things to get better." What reverberated in John's being was, "He loves me; He loves me! I'm preoccupied with it; I am captured. The Genesis 1 God is in love with me."

This is so intense! Beloved, when that thunders in your being, it changes the way you view yourself, and it changes your daydream. Your holy daydream changes what you think about when your hands are not occupied in a task. When John would drift, he wouldn't think about scoring the touchdown in the Super Bowl, he would think, "The Genesis 1 God is in love with me. I want the anointing to love Him back and I want to get His secrets. It is within my reach by the Holy Spirit." This thing got hold of John.

THE COURAGE NEVER TO SURRENDER

All of us have difficulty, all the time. Everyone in the world has difficulties, things they encounter throughout their life. You're not the main one being picked on by the devil. Everyone in the earth has all kinds of negative things happening to them constantly.

So, through the years when something negative would happen, of resistance—"here I am working hard to have a breakthrough in my spirit, or a breakthrough in the ministry, or a breakthrough in finance, or a breakthrough in whatever," put one of ten things there, and it's not working, like you I ask the question, and it's a very important question, "Why am I even doing all of this? Why am I putting so much effort in?" So I use these times where I'm laboring hard for a breakthrough in my heart, in my life, in my ministry, and there's resistance, resistance by demons, resistance by people, or resistance by my own pride, sin, and lust, resistance, resistance, resistance, and I say, "Why am I pressing so hard?"

Then the devil whispers, as he does to all of us, all the time, "Why don't you just give up and give in?" That's the number-one thing the devil is always whispering: "Give up and give in." He's telling it to six billion people today. So if you think, "Wow, how did you know?" it's because he's telling the same story to six billion people every single day. "Give up! Give in! Quit!"

So this is what I've been doing for thirty years. I've had this sentence for nearly thirty years. I want to give this sentence to you; it's very simple. I would say, "Now, what is the deal? OK. You are the Genesis 1 God. You love me. OK, cool. You love me. I've got it made. You are God, You love me, and I love you. I am loved and I am a lover. I am loved by God and I am a lover of God. I am loved; I am a lover."

Because of that reality, beloved, I am already successful. No matter what happens, I have already succeeded in the major issue of why I have life on the earth, and so have you. Because out of the nearly seven billion people on the earth, most don't receive the love of God, but you did. It's a miracle that you did, but you did. You're one of the minority in human history that actually took the love of God. It's a free gift, but you took it. That already sets you apart in human history as one of the minority of the successful human beings in history.

But you have done more than that. It's more than the fact that you received the love of God. He loves you; you said yes; you accepted it instead of rejecting it. You went a step further: You love Him. Not very many people—I mean, it's a billion, but still, billions more don't love Him. Beloved, you desire to please Jesus. That is an amazing grace of God operating in you. Now, you're so used to the idea that it may not move you anymore. Your desire for God is God's gift to you. The very fact that you desire Him is His gift working inside of you.

"I AM ALREADY SUCCESSFUL"

So maybe you struggle with this, that, and the other, those ten things you're struggling with. You have pain and anguish, but beloved, take a step back. Realize that the two most important things are already in place.

"Yes, but I've got pride, lust, bitterness, addictions, and pain!"

Yes, that's true, you've got those thunderous things in your personality, but stop and think. The Genesis 1 God loves you, and you've said yes to Him and you love Him back. I've worked this muscle a thousand times over the years. I say, "You love me. OK, I love You. I am already successful." So when I understand that I'm already successful, I approach problems with a totally different spirit.

Most people approach their problems, their ministry, their relationship, their business because they're trying to become successful by that ministry working. I don't get my success from the breakthrough in the ministry, in the business, in the relationship. I get success from my relationship with God. I'm operating in this difficulty from a place where I'm already successful.

If you know right now that you're already successful, you will approach your ministry with a totally different spirit. When you have setbacks, you're thinking, "I'm not trying to have a big ministry to be successful, I already am successful! He loves me; I love Him. I am already successful!" Then you approach the setbacks with a totally different spirit. The setbacks are still bad; you don't like them, but you have confidence in your spirit and you have a sense of peace in your spirit because you're solving the problem. You're facing it from a place of success instead of trying to get success from solving the problem.

If I solve the problems in the ministry at IHOP-KC, I don't become successful then. I'm already successful. If IHOP-KC disappears, I'm already successful. So I would work that muscle a thousand times when the pain and setbacks come. I say, "You love me; I love You; I am already successful. That is why I am on the earth. John 21:20 is what I'm going for and by the way, Lord, would You help me solve the financial problem? Would You

solve the ministry problem? Would You solve the relationship problem? Would you release the healing? Would you release Your favor?" But I don't need those things to be successful because I already am successful, and so are you.

"AS THE FATHER HAS LOVED ME, SO I LOVE YOU"

If that could touch your spirit, it could transform your life. We're going to read that same verse again. "Peter, turning around, the saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following." So Peter turned around and there was John following, but John calls himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

This revelation began at the last supper. We've looked at John 15:9 on an almost regular basis. If there's one verse you have to get at Awakening Teen Camp, it's John 15:9. Well, there are ten verses you have to get, but this is one of those ten. Jesus said this: "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you" (Jn. 15:9). God loves me in the way that God loves God. God loves you in the way that God loves God. It cannot ever improved. God the Father cannot love Jesus more because His love for Jesus is perfect. Well, His love for you is perfect; it cannot improve. Even a billion years from now in the resurrection, when you've been perfect for a billion years in the age to come, He won't love you more than He loves you right now.

THE CENTERPIECE OF GOD'S HEART

This truth thundered inside of John's spirit. It reverberated. I mean, it dominated his inner man. This truth was the controlling thought in John's life. "He loves me like God loves God!" John says, "I have it made!" Beloved, every one of you have the right—a billion believers on the earth all have the right to stand with confidence as God's favorite one. "God loves me, Jesus loves me, as much as the Father loves Him! I cannot be loved any more by God. It will never increase. Jesus will not love me more a billion years from now. It can never grow. I have it made. It is done. I am the main man." You are the main man; you are the main woman; you are the centerpiece of His heart.

PUTTING FIRST REWARDS FIRST

If this could get hold of your spirit, it would thunder in you, and then something would thunder back to God in love and abandonment because the reason a lot of times we lack commitment is because we're pursuing our secondary rewards. We get in so much pain and disappointment in our secondary rewards. We get all distracted and discombobulated. If we could connect with this truth, it would change us in a dramatic way.

RIDING THIS WAVE FOREVER

Now it's seventy years later, because John was twenty years old at the last supper when Jesus said, "I love you the way God loves me." John is now in his nineties. He's still saying this: "I am the one Jesus likes."

Someone could say, "Where did you get that?"

"At the last supper."

"That was seventy years ago."

John says, "I am riding this wave forever. I am never getting off this wave."

Seventy years later, John is giving his signature verse. He's quoting the last supper when Jesus said, "I love you like the Father loves Me." He says, "I am running with that. I am the guy God likes."

Peter could have said, "What? So am I."

John says, "Well, put it into your epistle. Put it in your letter! I'm fine with that. Make it your signature."

Beloved, we want this to be our signature for our life. Can you imagine, it's seventy years later and John is still holding onto this truth. He's signing off; he's about to die. He writes his signature verse and says, "I'm not the great evangelist; I'm not the great theologian; I'm not the guy who knew all the famous people. I'm the guy God likes. That's who I am! That is how I've seen myself for seventy years, ever since Jesus said it in the last supper." When Jesus said that, the thunder of God began to operate in his spirit in a new way.

THE EYES OF GOD ARE EVER ON YOU IN DELIGHT

When we know the King loves us, when we know He loves us, beloved, we can remain unmoved when other people ignore us. When we're overlooked by all the cool people, when we're overlooked by all the important people in authority, the Genesis 1 God loves us. He loves you. Everyone can overlook you, but the eyes of God are on you. Beloved, you've got it made. You are not trying to be successful; you already are successful. Everything else is your secondary blessings, your secondary rewards. I love those areas! Like I said, I want the Lord to give me double anointing in all of those areas, but they're not going to make me more successful, because I'm already successful because He loves me. I love Him; therefore I'm successful. That is my confession.

HE KNEW WHAT HE WAS GETTING WHEN HE CHOSE YOU

It's the most interesting thing: In Matthew 26:31, a few hours after Jesus said, "I love you the way the Father loves Me," He said, "By the way, every one of you will stumble tonight" (paraphrased). Jesus wasn't saying this with any kind of false expectation; He knew. Can you imagine Jesus saying, "I love you like the Father loves Me, but tonight you will compromise and stumble in a great way, but that doesn't change the fact of how I feel"?

There was no disillusionment in Jesus. It's not like Jesus got the package that said, "Mike Bickle," unwrapped it, found this messed-up stuff in my life, and said, "Oh, no... this is what you're about? You know, on second thought, I don't think I need you in My kingdom." No. He said, "Mike, when I chose you, when I drew you to My kingdom, I knew what I got when you said yes. I knew the mess you were in when you said yes. I wanted you. You are the guy I wanted."

Beloved, He is not shocked. You may be shocked when you discover some new pocket of darkness in your life, but He is not shocked. He knew what He got when He went after you. He knew what He was after. He wants you.

HE WILL BLESS THOSE WHO SET THEIR LOVE ON HIM

We've already said it all, so now I can just repeat it back to you. In John 21:20, John said, "I am the one who leaned on His breast!" John leaned on the heart of Jesus. Go to Psalm 91:14. God is speaking in Psalm 91 and talking about blessings that He'll give different ones. He says, "I am going to bless this man because he has set his love on Me" (paraphrased).

You can set your love on Jesus, which means you can make a decision that you're going to pour yourself out to love Him, even before you feel the love. You can set your heart to love Him, even before you feel it. A lot of people set their love on their ministry. They set their love on their career. They set their love on their musical ability. They set their love on their worship team. They set their love on their future occupation. They set their love on their ideal family that they're dreaming about having one day. Those are all good things to love, but you don't want to set the greatest part of your heart on those things. You want those to be second, very important, but second to setting your love on Him.

The Lord says, "To the man or woman who sets their love on Me, My eyes are on them." You can do this. The anointing to love Jesus was the number-one dream of John's heart. This is what John wanted more than anything else.

JOHN KNEW THE SECRETS OF THE HEART OF GOD

In John 20:21, he says, "I am the disciple who said, 'Lord, who is the one that betrays you?'" John positioned himself. He sat next to Jesus at the table, but it's more than where he sat at the last supper. At the last supper he leans on Jesus' heart, but I mean more than that. In life, for seventy years from age 20 to age 90, he set his life in a position to go after the deep things of God's heart. He said, "This is what I'm going for. I want to know what is near and dear to Your heart."

I'm not talking about really strange information about categories of angels, and knowing the secrets of the angelic realm. That's not what I'm talking about. When I talk about knowing the secrets of His heart, I'm talking about knowing the things that weigh on His heart. I don't just mean the negative things that weigh on His heart, I mean the positive things as well.

"Jesus, I want to know what is near and dear to Your heart. I want the anointing of revelation to understand what You are thinking and what You are feeling. That is what I want more than anything. I want that more than I want my ministry to increase. I want the anointing of revelation to know what You're thinking, to know what You're feeling, to know what is near and to know what is dear to You right now." John said, "That is what I went for, and God gave it to me."

SITTING AND LEARNING AT THE VERY FEET OF GOD

In Luke 10, it says that Mary sat at the feet of Jesus. Look at this: "Mary sat at the feet of Jesus and heard His word" (Lk. 10:39). Then, in verse 42, Jesus said, "Mary has chosen the good part." Now, I'm talking about the way we receive the things that are near and dear to Him. Again, I'm not talking about strange information about the angelic realm, because some people want to know secrets so they can have insight or info so that they can dazzle everyone. I don't want to dazzle people with secrets like that. I want my heart to be dazzled by God's heart. I want to know His heart. I want to feel what He is feeling. That anointing of revelation is more precious than gold, and every one of us in this room can have it if we want it.

It's going to take time to sit at the feet of Jesus. Mary sat at the feet of Jesus. That means she took time, and opened her Bible. In the New Testament sense of sitting at His feet, today it means we take time, open our Bibles, and talk to Jesus as we're reading the Bible. We're saying, "I love You. I want to know what You're thinking from Genesis to Revelation," not just the four Gospels, in the story of Jesus, but all through, wherever we read, I like to talk to Jesus as I'm reading. "What does this mean? How do You feel about that? Would You

help me to do this in my life? Would You help me to avoid that in my life?" I read the Bible and I talk to Jesus while I'm reading it. That's what it means to sit at the feet of Jesus. It's really simple.

FASCINATED WITH THE GOD-MAN WHO LOVES ME

Now I've heard this over the years: "Well, Mike, you're a Bible teacher. If I was preparing sermons, I would read the Bible more." So the idea is that if you've got to tell someone Bible information, then you should study the Bible. I do study the Bible to prepare for sermons, for messages, but that's not mostly why I study the Bible. I mostly study the Bible because I want to feel His heart. I want to connect with His heart. I don't study the Bible mostly to give information to someone else. I want the information because I want to be fascinated with the God-Man who loves me.

Mary never had a teaching ministry, ever. You never hear Mary's name ever mentioned in the Bible again, or in Church history, except for right there, three times in the Gospels. If you were to say, "Mary, why do you spend so much time studying the Bible?" she would say, "Because I want to know His heart."

"But Mary, you're not an apostle! You're not a Bible teacher! You don't even have a Bible study!"

"That's fine. I want to know His heart. I want to feel what He feels. That's what I'm after." And the Lord said about Mary in Luke 10:42, "She has chosen the good thing—the right thing and the good thing."

Now John was there when this event is happening in Luke 10. John took note of this. He said, "If Jesus calls this good, I'm going after it." Seventy years later, John said, "I am going after His secrets. I've been doing this for seventy years. I've been doing what Mary did. Jesus lit up when Mary was in front of Him, and I want Jesus to light up when He sees me sitting in front of Him like Mary did." Undoubtedly it impacted John in a powerful way when Jesus said, "This is good."

"BUT WHO WILL DO THE WORK OF THE KINGDOM?"

I'm bringing this to an end. People say this, and I've heard it for thirty years: "Well, if we sit at the feet of Jesus all day, who's going to do the work of the kingdom?"

That's a great argument. It's a totally irrelevant argument, meaning I've been doing this for over thirty years, and I've never met a person who sits at the feet of Jesus all day. It's a theoretical person who does not exist. I talk to leaders and they say, "Well, at IHOP-KC, people sit in the prayer room all day!"

I say, "If you interviewed the ten most devoted people at IHOP-KC, the people who spend the most time in the prayer room, they are in pain about how little time they really spend in the prayer room."

There's no one at IHOP-KC sitting at the feet of Jesus so much that they have time for no one. There's no one. It's a totally theoretical, fictitious argument, used mostly by people who don't want to sit at the feet of Jesus, so they create the argument of, "What if we did?" Well, that guy doesn't exist; I've never met him. I'm a sit-at-the-feet-of-Jesus guy. I know guys who do this. But I don't do it all day long, and I've never met a person who does. Throw that argument away! There's no fear of you overdoing it. You may be really extreme for three weeks or three months, but in ten and twenty and thirty years, you probably won't overdo it. If you do, you'll be the first one I've ever met. Don't worry about that. Sit at the feet of Jesus because connecting with His heart won't come when you're on the run.

“HOW MANY HOURS IS SUFFICIENT?”

Someone says, “How long?” Well, for every person the time is different. Sitting at the feet of Jesus for one person is a different amount of time than it is for another person. It depends on the assignment God gives you. Not only that, it’s different for every person in every season of your life. It’s different. I sat at the feet of Jesus in my twenties in a way that was different than my thirties. Then I did it in my forties in a different way than in my thirties. The same person will do it differently in different seasons of his or her life. There’s no answer someone can tell you.

I get asked all the time, “No, tell me for sure, really, how many hours?”

I say, “I’m not going to tell you how many hours.”

“No, quit being humble!”

I say, “I’m not trying to be humble. If I tell you how many hours I do, you’ll foolishly try to imitate it when you don’t have my assignment and you’re not in the same season of life I’m in, and I don’t want you to mess up.”

“No, come on... how many hours?”

“I’m not going to tell, because we do it according to the season and the assignment that we have.”

My point is, I don’t want to get some kind of gymnastics bar set up, and if you get over that bar, then you have bragging rights. This isn’t about bragging rights; it’s about encountering the Genesis 1 God who is in love with you. This is not about showmanship. It’s about how God wants to tell you the secrets of His heart if you’re interested in knowing them.

MINISTRY TIME

Amen. Let’s stand.

Thank you. That is my favorite secondary reward, not when you clap, but when you clap about a message like this. That means you like this; that means Jesus is smiling. Then I say, “Yes! We’ve got them.” That’s why I like it.

So we’re going to close our eyes and be undistracted for a moment. We’re going to focus on the throne. What I’m going to ask is for the Holy Spirit to mark you as a son of thunder, that tonight you would have a new vision, a new resolve to know the thunder of His heart towards you.

You say, “I’m going to go after this. He loves me the way God loves Him; I have it made! I’m going to get this. I’m going to drink from this.” But it’s not just that as a son of thunder, He thunders to you. You’re going to thunder back in love to Him. That is your life goal; that is the anointing you want more than life itself—the anointing to feel love and to love Him back with God. Beloved, you will be a great lover of people if you love God this way and you have the anointing of revelation to hear His heart.

Father, I ask You right now that we would be sons of thunder, male and female.

We're going to wait on the Lord for a moment as the instruments continue to play this. It's good. We're going to wait on the Holy Spirit. I mean, I'm asking Him literally to mark you. The way He marks you, you may feel His presence, you may not, but here's what I mean: You buy into it. You say, "I'm doing it." If you say, "I'm doing it," you're marked. I tell you, the devil isn't going to talk you into this, and neither is the flesh. If you go for this, it's because the Spirit is convincing you.

Holy Spirit, come and mark younger ladies, older ladies; mark us, younger men, older men. Mark us as sons of thunder. That is what I want, Jesus. The three things of John 21:20 are my goal, Lord. If You appeared to me tonight, this is what I would ask for. I want to know how much You love me. I want to love You second to no one in the earth. I want to love You second to no one in the earth by the anointing of the Spirit, and I want to know Your secrets. If You stood in front of me, that is what I would ask You for. This is my life vision starting tonight, these three things. This is what I want.

Talk to Him; talk to Him. It's good to want a ministry; it's good to want financial blessing; it's good to want favored relationships; it's good to want romance. Those are good things, but those are not the primary reasons you have life on the earth. Those are secondary. I want you actually to tell the Lord this. If the Lord said, "If I asked you whatever you wanted, and I would give it to you, what is it?" just whisper to Him what it is. Actually say what you want from Him. If He appeared to you right now and said, "Anything you want," tell Him what you would say.

Be honest. Some of you say, "No, I'm still going for the big ministry. I'll do this one later." Others of you say, "No, I'm going to do this. This is my life vision starting tonight," if it's new to some of you.

Release Your power, Holy Spirit. I'm just going to have you stay in your chairs because you'll all come up and there's no room. Holy Spirit, mark this precious group of people today. Jesus, this is what I want. Fifteen-year olds, eighteen-year olds—beloved, John was only about eighteen or twenty when he set his heart in this way. Lord, come touch me tonight; I set my heart upon You.