

JOHN – AN AGENT OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT PAR EXCELLENCE

by Pitcharan

ABSTRACT

John's gospel is a systematic revelation of the way to eternal glory, having a definite beginning, a comprehensive description of the process and an imagery that perfectly envisions the final state to be attained. Of the very many power-packed and wonderful messages in John's gospel, just a select few are shared here as perceived.

EXCERPTED TEXTS

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A native of Tamil Nadu, voluntarily engaged in the spiritual formation of youth in the Catholic Diocese of Dharmapuri. He took to spiritual writing in 2005 under the pen-name Pitcharan and has since written six books, all on spiritual theology.

Introduction

The soul stirring language and mysterious depth of John's gospel confounded me and I was provoked to read it again and again. I noticed these rare combinations of features – deep but candid – different but harmonious; yes, the contents vis-a-vis the synoptic gospels are clearly in harmony and not really contradictory. I am convinced that John had no desire to be deliberately different and the uniqueness is only for this noble purpose – to complement rather than duplicate the synoptic gospels.

The synoptic gospels are an excellent record of all what Jesus had taught through word and example; yet there is a hidden need for an interwoven structure with a focused progression. This is exactly what John has accomplished most beautifully; his gospel suggests that he has thoroughly read the synoptic gospels, recognized the hidden need and then chose to offer something more which is also synergistic. Taken together, the four gospels transform from a mere collection of teachings into a versatile four dimensional perspective of the narrow way that leads to everlasting life.

Saving Faith

John reveals at the very outset that it is **saving faith** that gains us the greatest privilege of becoming 'children of God'. From the *Nathaniel* episode (Jn 1:43-51) we may infer, that belief or unbelief implies an interior conviction which may or may not be right. Nathaniel too was wrong when he initially refused to believe that his friends had found the Messiah – Jesus of Nazareth. His conviction came from his own flawed understanding of Jewish prophecies; while he knew that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem and that no prophet had risen from Nazareth, he was ignorant of another prophecy *that he would be called a Nazarene* (Matt 2:23). But neither his flawed understanding nor any other false teaching could stop him from finally knowing the truth. Because, what really mattered, was his attitude towards truth and he was indeed on the side of truth as Jesus proclaimed: *“Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is no deceit”* (Jn 1:47b). To err is most human and all wrongdoing is not out of love for darkness. Despite failures, shortcomings, weaknesses and grave offences, we are bound to receive mercy when the 'moment of truth' arrives suddenly, provided we have no love for darkness. *Blessed is the one whose sin the LORD does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit* (Ps 32:2).

Saving faith is an extraordinary interior vision that comes from God as a surprise offer at an appointed moment, to all those who love what is good and hate evil. I believe that this offer is never made to those with a depraved love for darkness, as it is bound to be rejected and spurned. Those who do not love evil are on the side of truth and are drawn to Jesus at the chosen time by God the Father. Whenever this happens, it is the 'moment of truth' and an offer of the greatest gift – being reborn as God's own children. The best

example is that of Paul, who had fanatically opposed the name of Jesus and also brutally persecuted his followers. Was it out of ignorance or love for darkness? *“Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief”* (1Tim 1:13).

Accepting God's offer and receiving the greatest gift, commences the process of liberation from sinful slavery. The following verses from John's gospel expound **saving faith** excellently:

.... , to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. (Jn 1:12-13)

.... , unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' (NJKV Jn 3:5-7)

Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. (Jn 3:20)

But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God. (Jn 3:21)

“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. (Jn 5:24)

“For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.” (Jn 6:40)

“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day”. (Jn 6:44)

..... I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (Jn 14:6)

“... In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” (Jn 18:37cde)

Abiding Grace

We are saved by faith – very true; and yes, most of us are too happy to be Christians or rather overjoyed about this privilege. Apparently, we seem to be rejoicing without also realizing that this greatest privilege too has its own demands like any other privilege. Consider this very simple example: during these days of high unemployment, it is a rare privilege to be offered a decent job. Yet, anyone who fails to meet the demands of their job, is bound to lose it and this could even be very unceremonious.

Mahatma Gandhi was overawed by the teachings of Christ, but was very critical about Christians – WHY? This is no ordinary challenge; it is the biggest challenge for not just

Christians but all humans. We know very well how badly our first parents stumbled. Their stumbling was replicated or rather surpassed by God's chosen people during their Exodus to the Promised Land through the Desert of Sin, after being saved from brutal slavery in Egypt.

What lessons can we learn from the past? Our first parents were flawless before the Fall, having the image and likeness of God. But the fact that they stumbled, suggests that they lacked something. Since God had provided for all their needs, whatever they lacked cannot be something that was due from God. Is it too difficult to logically deduce, what was it they lacked? Could it be anything other than – **gratitude**? For all the love and bounties they received from God, had they been grateful, this would have surely gained them grace which in turn would have saved them from Satan's deception and enabled them to **abide**. (see Ps 106:19-22 & Rom 1:21)

How do we abide and preserve our greatest privilege? **Gratitude is reciprocal love** and the **ONLY** source of **abiding grace**. *“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.”* (NASB Jn 14:15, 24).

The USP of John's gospel is **love** and he has accurately captured the cream and core of Jesus' message as may be noticed right at the very beginning when he declares: *For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.* (Jn 1:17). While Moses did his best to persuade, guide and convince his people about keeping the Law, he was unable to effectively enlighten them on how they could gain **abiding grace**. We may recall, that God had also revealed the source of **abiding grace** to Moses – *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength* (Deu 6:5). It is Jesus who perfectly enlightens the world about **abiding grace** which is the only means to fulfill the Law; he goes to the extent of being a living example of **selfless perfect love** by paying the highest price for it on the cross.

John is undoubtedly **the disciple whom Jesus loved** (Jn 13:23b); two things set John apart as an evangelist or rather an agent of human development par excellence – his deep realization that **abiding is the biggest challenge** and his thorough understanding and conviction that **love is everything**.

John's most awe-inspiring portrayals are: God's love – the link between love and fear of God – the link between love for God and neighbour. These verses on **God's love** speak for themselves and warrant no commentary:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish

but have eternal life (Jn 3:16).

I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (Jn 10:10b)

"The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep". (Jn 10:11b)

The OT view of God's wrath is rather confusing when we see both good and bad suffer from what we perceive as God's wrath. Moreover, love and fear for God are portrayed in such a way, that their link is just like the carrot and stick link. But John reveals a superior link that makes excellent practical sense and easy to relate – **fear of God** is all about the unbearable pain of **being cut-off from God's love**. Using the word friend in place of neighbour, sounds much better. **Love for God and neighbour** are linked by a straightforward statement that implies that one can't exist without the other:

*If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: **Love each other as I have loved you**. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. (Jn 15:10-15)*

Liberating Truth

Jesus did not limit his focus to **love** that gains **abiding grace**; he was fully aware and also most lovingly concerned that, even saved humans are slaves to sin and suffer helplessly against their own will. To be able to abide they need to be liberated with a **special dose of grace**. He revealed to his disciples the crucial knowledge about **truth that liberates**: *To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* (Jn 8:31-32).

Liberating Truth is indeed a **special dose of grace** and the fruit of perseverance of those who struggle to abide. It assumes paramount importance in our current context when drugs and porn-addiction have emerged as devastating demons. Supportive efforts that usher **liberating truth**, include interventions and prayerful intercessions by God's chosen instruments, for their fellow humans who are trapped in carnal bondage, chronic backwardness and false beliefs. Jesus accomplished psychological liberation of tax-collectors, prostitutes and idolaters by talking to them compassionately, asking gentle questions, patiently listening and telling stories that continue to provoke much introspection and propel many into positive transformation.

Metaphors and allegories

Not a single parable has been cited by John, but their absence is more than compensated by metaphors and allegories. They are amazingly rich and deep and their message lingers for a long time, making us ponder much:

Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. (NJKV Jn 12:24-25)

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. (Jn 15:1-6)

Conclusion

John's gospel presents a holistic picture of the process of divinisation and the journey to ultimate glory, most systematically. It commences with our believing in Jesus to become reborn (saved) children of God – true belief implies obedience to the love command – our rebirth (salvation) may be sustained only by abiding in Jesus – if we truly abide then we are bound to bear good fruits – our fruitfulness is rendered most abundant by God the Father when we endure Godsend sufferings (pruning) – this reaches perfection in total self denial for which Jesus himself sets the example for all humanity – our salvation attains fulfillment with the final glorification that follows.