

John John 20:30-31

(At the opening John is sitting, casually dressed with a legal pad in his lap. He is chewing on a pencil, lost in thought. He is surrounded by crumpled bits of paper.)

Intro

A. Right Opening

(Thinks for a moment, hums “Jesus Loves Me”) *(Quickly glances at his paper for a moment.)* All right, let’s see what we’ve got here. “My Memoirs. By John, second son of Zebedee. Chapter 1.” “In the beginning . . . In the beginning . . . *(Obviously unhappy, he tries again.)* In the beginning . . . *(With a little more dramatic reflection.)* IN THE BEGINNING . . . Naw, that won’t cut it. *(Disheartened, rips page off and tosses it over his shoulder.)* It’s already been used. *(Paces about.)* It’s gotta be more of a grabber. Something that will hit the reader right between the eyes! Something that’ll reveal who He really was, His true nature! It’s too important not to get right. How about, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair¹.” That’s good, but not what I need! Or how about “long, long ago, and far, far away...” No, it’s not me, not my voice.

B. Writer’s Block

(Speaks directly to the audience.) Writer’s block, can you believe it? A title and my name and I’m already stuck. It’s not really my own story I’m trying to write, but His, *(Gives a quick glance upward)*, and how His life changed mine forever. You’d think that wouldn’t be so hard, to write about someone who turned my life upside down. Someone I came to love more than life itself.

C. Word Use

But when you’re an author, you weigh every word. You commit Roget’s Thesaurus to heart. You weigh each word until you find the right one. Your sentences do not have to be fancy and complicated; they need to be well reasoned and precise. Your words don’t have to be flowery, but they do need to convey complicated ideas and powerful emotions as accurately as possible. Every word may convey more than one idea. And, like all good authors, I’m suffering for my art. I’ve been exiled to this island because of my beliefs in Him. But, if you must pick an island to be banished to, Patmos is not a bad place. A lot of us old, retired guys, past our prime, live a solitary life here, waiting for inspiration to hit. *(Ruefully rubbing his chin.)* Some of us die waiting.

¹ *A tale of Two Cities, Charles Dickens.*

D. Objective

Do you understand my struggle? I am not just trying to write a book. That would be easy enough but I am trying to create a yearning within my reader. I want to touch people whose hearts are burdened. I want to reach people who feel overwhelmed, hopeless, or lost. I want to show them the answer to what keeps them awake at night, that makes them jump at shadows, that robs their lives of contentment and joy. I know the answer. I have seen the Light of men. But some people can't see it, or maybe they don't want to see it. They are waiting for the next big thing, the next special relationship, whatever. But I have it right here (*points to heart*) – the next big thing, the most marvelous relationship. It is Jesus, God's Son, our Savior, the Prince of Peace; it's all of these.

Story

A. Last Meal

(*Drops the pad.*) Ugh! Maybe I am trying too hard. Maybe if I just jump in and tell you some of what happened, inspiration will come to me. But I don't want to start at the beginning . . . I'm already stuck for an opening. Suffice it to say that an awful lot happened after Jimmy and I told Dad and Mom that we would no longer be working at Zebedee's & Sons Fishing Company, instead we were students of the Teacher, Jesus. A lot happened between then and where I'll start. Let me start, instead, with what we all thought was the beginning of the end . . . our last meal together. Let me see...I jotted down some notes in the event someone might come for a visit.

B. Growth Edges

When Jesus finished washing our feet, and we all settled back for the meal; that's when Jesus dropped the bomb. He was always catching us unprepared. If we seemed to get a little too comfortable, He would always say or do something to make us squirm a bit. He constantly tested our limits of comfortability. You see, we learned that pain comes at what Jesus called our growth edges. He kept expanding our growth edges, pushing them out. He expanded our knowledge of ourselves and the world. When He told us that one of us would betray Him, none of us jumped to our feet to contradict Him. Instead, we scanned the room, looking at each other; no one really catching anyone else's eye for fear of what they would see in their own.

C. Betrayal

Pete whispered to me, "Ask Him who it is."

So, I leaned over and asked, "Who is it, Lord?"

(*Pause*) Isn't it strange that we all thought it might be us? How else can I explain that even after He'd handed the bread to Judas and told him to do what he had to do, none of us attempted to stop him. Maybe that's because none of us could see beyond our own

trembling fingers, thankful that the bread wasn't handed to us. Maybe it's because we were all culpable to some degree. As I said, Jesus kept pushing our growth edges, taking us into unfamiliar territory. Sometimes we had very little solid ground under our feet, metaphorically speaking, and then again there was a lot that confused us, including ourselves.

Whatever the reason, Jesus didn't hold it against us. Instead, He comforted us with . . . (*said in wonder*) with words . . . Words that not only soothed our hearts but broke them as well. He spoke of Peter's denial, and in the same breath told us to love each other, as He loved us. He spoke of truth, and a way, and of life with meaning . . . for which all the great poets search.

D. New Commandment

He spoke in perfect metaphor about a true vine and a Gardener . . . and about the branches. It was pure poetry. He is a wordsmith, and that is not surprising since He is the Word incarnate. Then, in the same breath, He commanded us to love one another. He called us to lay down our lives for each other. His words were beautiful . . . and yet His truths were hard.

He said the world would hate us and that we would grieve and weep and mourn in this life. And in the same breath He said that He would send comfort and that our sorrow would turn to jubilation. He also promised us that he would send us the Comforter from the Father, the Holy Spirit, who would bring to our minds all that He, Jesus, had taught us.

E. Anguish/Joy

I have known both the anguish and the joy He spoke of . . . the anguish of seeing Him nailed to a tree, the bittersweet responsibility of looking after His mother in His absence, and the joy of an empty grave.

F. Jesus before Pilate

I've known what it is for my soul to be in torment as He stood before the governor and let Himself be sentenced to die. (*Desperately*) You see, I was there! He had the opportunity to save Himself. The governor even asked Him if He was lord over some kingdom.

He answered that His kingdom was not of this world. But that He was Lord and it was the truth for which He had come to testify.

Now listen closely to what happened next, for it set the world on its ear. Pilate asked Jesus (*snidely*), "What is truth?"

(*Achingly, drawn out!*) And Jesus . . . stood . . . silent! And that was His moment! All He had to do was tell him and He could have walked free! Better yet, He

could have called on all the armies of heaven to save Him in that moment. But He chose to stand silent.

G. Faith

Which makes a better argument, to show that you can back up your words with force or a silent testimony of faith? I did not understand then, but I do now. For that is a moment we all face, isn't it? Sometime in our lives, we must stare Him in the face and either acknowledge the truth or turn away from it. But either way, it doesn't change. Jesus could have forced Pilate to see the truth, but would it have been the same? What do you think Jesus would have preferred: a forced confession from Pilate or a voluntary confession from the centurion in charge of Jesus' crucifixion? At the end of the day the centurion, who witnessed all the events, confessed, "Truly, this was the Son of God." When Pilate stared Truth in the face, it was Pilate's moment to choose . . . not Christ's.

Post Crucifixion

A. Spreading the Word

Anyway, after the crucifixion, our lives were turned upside down and the truth became apparent to us. The resurrection solidified our reception of Jesus as the promised Savior, but it did not make our lives any easier. The remaining disciples and I waited in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit, which happened fifty days later on Pentecost. The Spirit moved us to proclaim Christ -- him crucified and raised. We proclaimed the truth in that city with great success and also against increasing opposition. Peter and I often traveled together throughout the town proclaiming life and forgiveness in the crucified and resurrected Christ. The Jewish authorities were astonished by us because they considered us "uneducated, common men," and yet we boldly defied them and the church kept growing. The authorities could not silence us and neither could they argue against us.

B. Paul

I remained in Jerusalem for many years, even after a general persecution broke out against Christians. My brother James was martyred, slain by the sword on order of King Herod Agrippa I. Yet I remained and became a pillar of the church. I was still there when Paul came to us fourteen years after his conversion and reported all that Barnabas and he had done in bringing the Gentiles into the flock of Christ. We extended the right hand of fellowship to them and commissioned Paul to continue working among the Gentiles, as I continued to lead the church at Jerusalem and care for Jesus' mother.

C. Clamor for More

Eventually I departed Jerusalem; Mary and I settled in Ephesus. At last, I had the opportunity for some deep reflection and to compose some thoughts. I am the last remaining apostle. The others have preceded me in death. The Christian church throughout the region has been clamoring for me to record what I remember about my

time with Jesus. They want me to supplement what has been written by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. There is much that I can add and that is what I have been attempting to do except for this confounded writer's block. There are also some heresies such as Gnosticism that I am in an advantageous position to address. I think I will also need to take the time to answer some of the other burning issues of the day. Official persecution has flared up again and again under Vespasian, Domitian, and Trajan, and some people are beginning to wonder if the promised day will ever arrive. I need to reassure Christ's followers that God will reign triumphantly. All history is working toward His desired conclusion as history led to the birth, death, and resurrection of our dear Lord Jesus.

Oh well, Jesus was more than a great poet. Poets search to find meaning in the chaos of our lives. We search to find a sense of direction or purpose to living. We search for truth. But I have found it. (*With a sense of desperation.*) You see, that's what I want to convey to people! The truth of the matter --!

C. Truth/Word

(*Stops, stunned at the revelation.*) Wait a minute! That's it! (*Scrambles to find the last paper he crumpled up, smooths it out and writes frantically.*) "In the beginning was the Truth, and the Truth was with God, and the Truth was God . . . He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made." And how about this? Talk about poetic, insightful and profound, "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

Conclusion

(*Holds it out.*) That's it! Now I've got something to build on. And it came to me in a flash, like a . . . a . . . what's the word I'm looking for? . . . (*Snaps his fingers with insight.*) Yes, that's it, inspiration! Now maybe I can get down to business! I hate to cut our conversation short, but I have important work to do. He is risen! (*He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!*) Amen.

Ninety percent of the material in John's Gospel is original with him. He more than likely had the benefit of the other gospels and didn't need to include what they had already written. He supplemented the synoptic Gospels. John's Greek is the simplest to read, but like a true poet he makes every word count! His purpose was to show that Jesus was truly the Word of God, the Truth of God, and the Love of God. He concludes his Gospel by saying that he could have added much more, but why bother? He has written more than enough to lead the reader to the truth. John wrote, "That these things have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, and believing have life in his name." Amen.

May the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Sola Dei Gloria!