

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Paul Gunn, Pastor
Fresh Start and New Beginnings Series

JOHN: THUNDER TO LOVE

Mark 3:13-18; John 19:25-26; Ephesians 4:21-24

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INTRODUCTION: Today is the fourth sermon in the series called Fresh Starts and New Beginnings. Today's sermon is on John: Thunder to Love. There are 3 points to today's sermon. Maybe you can say them with me by now.

- John was given a new life.
- John was given a new calling.
- God offers us the same.

The first of this series featured Mary Magdalene, next was Matthew, then was Peter. While they were all different people, they became new people because of Christ. Today, look at how God changed John's life.

1-JOHN WAS GIVEN A NEW LIFE

SCRIPTURE: Mark 3:13-18

Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. ¹⁴ He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach ¹⁵ and to have authority to drive out demons. ¹⁶ These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter), ¹⁷ James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means "sons of thunder"), ¹⁸ Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot ¹⁹ and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

EXPLANATION: Among the 12 was a man named John. This was the apostle John, not to be confused with John the Baptist or John Mark or any number of Johns who lived during the time of Jesus. John was as popular of a name then as it is now. John, the brother of James, the son of Zebedee, was a fisherman. Like

Simon and Andrew, John and James were called from their fishing boat. In fact, the Bible tells us that they were preparing nets with their father on the day Jesus beckoned them to come to him. While Simon was renamed Peter, the Rock, Jesus seems to have given James and John an affectionate sort of nickname. He called the brothers Sons of Thunder.

Why did Jesus call John a Son of Thunder? We can only guess, of course, but the name seems to aptly fit his personality. Let's review a couple of stories from John's early discipleship.

- In Mark 9, right after Jesus speaks to the disciples about the importance of loving children and allowing them to come to him, John spots someone casting demons out in Jesus's name. "Teacher," said John, "we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us." "Do not stop him," Jesus said. "For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me."
- In Luke 9, a Samaritan village fails to welcome Jesus and his followers. John and his brother ask Jesus for permission to call down fire and destroy them. Jesus rebukes them.
- Although Matthew credits the request to their mother, in Mark 10, the two brothers are recorded as being bold enough to ask Jesus to grant them special seats in Heaven.

If we think of his nickname in terms of his personality, it seems that John was a strong presence among the disciples—bold, a little judgmental, and unafraid to make his voice heard.

ILLUSTRATION: Many faithful churchgoers came to know Christ as children. Many of you were probably reared in church. You know what church people look like. You know what we sound like. You know the unspoken expectations that come with being in a church building. But not everyone is that familiar with the Christian faith. There was a man named Bart who started coming to church with his wife in the 80s. The church was fairly conservative, and Bart came across to many as a bit rebellious. After some time, a person approached the pastor and suggested the pastor speak with him. The pastor wisely refrained. Eventually, Bart came to know the Lord. After a while, that rebellious disposition went away.

The preacher let God do the work in Bart's heart, and Bart became a changed man—not just on the outside but, more importantly, on the inside. John was not a preacher. John did not come from a preacher's family. John was a fisherman. We do not have a physical description, but I kind of think he was probably a big, burly fellow. I imagine he probably had big biceps from hauling in those heavy nets and big loads of fish. I bet he hung around a lot more fishermen than priests or rabbis. He probably knew a lot more about how to bait a hook than how to share the gospel. He was a storm not a gentle rain, but Jesus called John and listed him as one of his 12 closest friends.

- John was given a new life.

2-JOHN WAS GIVEN A NEW CALLING

SCRIPTURE: John 19:25-27

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," ²⁷ and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

EXPLANATION: Despite John's boisterous personality, he was part of Jesus's inner circle. Among the twelve, Peter, James, and John were given special access to several events. They were present when Jairus's daughter was raised from the dead. They were with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, and they were allowed more intimate closeness during his time of prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. When Jesus was taken prisoner, Peter and another disciple believed to be John were the only two who followed Jesus into the courtyard where he was being held. Bible teachers believe that it is John himself who was this disciple at the foot of the cross. There Jesus gave him a new assignment. Jesus entrusted the care of his mother, Mary, to the disciple John, otherwise known as the "disciple Jesus loved." Perhaps it was this act on the cross that was the final catalyst in the transformation of John's life.

ILLUSTRATION: An expert in child rearing once told the story of a mom whose son cleaned his room. The mother really bragged on her son. She told him what an

awesome job he did cleaning that room. Then, later that night, she bragged to Dad about how little Johnny had cleaned his room. She did not stop there. She really went over the top. She bragged to Grandma and Grandpa about how Johnny’s room was the cleanest in the house. For several days, every time, the mother spoke of Johnny, she mentioned his clean room. Then, the most surprising thing occurred. In the weeks and months and years that followed, Johnny began regularly cleaning his room. In fact, Johnny’s room did become the cleanest room in the house—not just on one day but every day. Johnny became the neatest of the family, not just on one day, but every day. Johnny grew into the image of the boy his mother had projected. Remember this story for a second.

EXPLANATION: Now, there is a lot we do not know about the disciples. So, some of this is just speculation. But, if you had asked me, I probably would not have entrusted the care of my mother to a man I called the Son of Thunder. I mean, it’s not like the crucifixion caught Jesus off guard. Sure, John was the only one standing there, but Jesus knew what was coming. Weeks before, he could have pulled one of the softer-hearted disciples aside and whispered in his ear, “Hey, can you take care of my mom for me after I’m gone?” Andrew seems like a good choice. After all, he was always bringing people to Jesus. He probably loved well.

But Jesus did not do that. Jesus entrusted his mother’s care to John. Like the mom with the little boy, Jesus projected the kind of man he wanted John to be, and John grew into that image. How do we know?

In addition to the book of John, which has been historically credited to him, John went on to write 1, 2, 3 John, books that are ripe with verses about love, and the book of Revelation, where he proclaims the vision given to him on the island of Patmos. According to the words of Paul in Galatians, John was one of the pillars of the New Testament church. His service and ministry alongside Peter is recorded throughout Acts.

We also see evidence in the way John refers to himself as “the disciple Jesus loved.” While to us this may seem arrogant, I think it is actually an indication of the change that had taken place in John’s heart. In following Christ, John became less willing to put himself at the forefront. He humbled himself to the point that he did not want to mention his own name in the telling of Christ’s story. He is not saying,

“the disciple Jesus loved more than anyone else.” **His aim was not to put himself above others, it was to pronounce his new identity in Christ.**

- John was given a new life.
- John was given a new calling.

3-GOD OFFERS US THE SAME – Now let’s look in Ephesians about how to put on one’s new self. Here is a complementary scripture for our topic today:

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 4:21-24

When you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. ²² You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

EXPLANATION: John was a Son of Thunder. He was bold, probably a little loud, and quick to judge. I do not think Jesus transformed John into a meek man. I think he took that boldness and used it for the glory of the Lord. I think he wiped away the judgmental attitude and replaced it with genuine and fierce love for others. Because John was willing to follow Jesus, Jesus was able to use John for the kingdom.

ILLUSTRATION: Did your mom ever give you a spit bath? You know what I mean, don’t you? Some of you have probably given your sons or daughters one. It’s when you see something on your child’s face (or maybe your husband’s). It’s probably a smudge of chocolate right at the corner of the lips or maybe some dried milk from their breakfast cereal. Sometimes it may be a little dirt on the cheek or around the temple. Anyway, someone—usually your mom or grandma—licks her thumb and then rubs it off.

APPLICATION: Sometimes, we act as if that’s what Jesus did for us. We act like he’s going around wiping the smudges of sin off our faces. But the Bible does not say that at all. The Bible says that when we come to Christ, we are made new. We are not given a spit bath. Jesus does not give us a cursory wipe-down or put make-up over our dirty selves. Jesus gives us a new heart, a new life, and a new calling.

- John was given a new life.

- John was given a new calling.
- God offers us the same.

CONCLUSION: Last year, I heard a fitness guy speak. He said everyone always says they are going to start getting fit on Monday, or on the first of the month. He said those really serious about getting fit need to start today. Right now. I like what he said, and I understand the principle, even though it's difficult to follow.

Spiritually, this principle has even more of a sense of urgency. Do not wait to surrender your life to Christ. Do not wait until what you see as a better time. The best time is right now!

INVITATION: When the Lord saves us, he does not dress up a corpse, he raises us from the dead. He raises us to a new life in him, following his commands, living righteously according to the example he set. This is the fresh start. This is the new beginning. If you do not know Jesus as your personal Savior, then today is the day to begin anew. The altar is open if you want to come forward.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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