

# Transformed by knowing Jesus: John

Message for Sunday, February 24, 2013  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** various passages about the apostle John

**Children's Message:** from Mark 10:35-45 (James and John ask for places of honour in Jesus' kingdom).

Let's pretend that you're part of a family where the sisters and brothers squabble a lot. I'm *sure* 😊 none of you are like that, so that's why we have to pretend.

Let's pretend that you're going on a trip, and you are arguing about who gets the best seat in the car. "I want to sit there!" "I said it first!" "So? I *sat* here first!" "You always get the best seat!"

That's sort of what it was like among Jesus' followers. Two of them, James and John, asked Jesus for a favour. "When you take your place on the throne in the kingdom of God, we want the best seats beside you, one on your left and one on your right." When the others heard about this, that started a huge argument: "I'm better than you are! I should get the best seat," and so on.

Isn't that amazing! These are grown men, adults, behaving like squabbling children! *Do you want to know something? Lots of adults are like that!*

Here's what Jesus said to them: "Whoever wants to be first must be the servant of the others." So they learned that day that following Jesus means NOT putting myself first.

What do you think Jesus might say to this family who are squabbling over seats in the car?

**Sermon:** "Transformed by Jesus: John"

Good morning. Thanks for welcoming me here today. My goodness, it's cold in this part of the world! Where I lived, it was mild all year round.

Oh yes... where I lived. That was in Israel. I grew up in the northern area, along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. I was a fisher by trade, like my father and his father before him. It was a good business; we had servants in our home. I started working with Dad almost as soon as I could walk. At first, it was only on land, helping to sort the fish. Then, when I could safely use a knife, I was cleaning the fish. Finally, one day he said I could go with him on the boat. That was the proudest moment of my youth.

I worked hard at the business. I figured that I would be captain of my own boat by the time I was thirty; maybe even own a fleet of fishing boats. Yes, I had big dreams.

All that changed, however, when Jesus came along. Everyone in town was talking about him, how he had healed sick people, how he spoke with such wisdom and power. I made sure to go and listen to him the next time he was in our area. The way he talked about God — no, the way he talked *to* God — was unlike anything I had ever heard. He didn't just know about God, like some of our teachers who have taken ten or twenty years of training. They knew all about God, but Jesus knew God personally, talked with God, and even called God "Father."

For me, religion had always been a matter of following rules, going to synagogue on the Sabbath, and occasionally travelling to Jerusalem to present a sacrifice. For Jesus, it wasn't a religion at all; it was more like a relationship. He loved God — no, I don't mean in the way that we would recite the prayer in our worship services:

**Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.**

**Love the LORD your God with all your heart—  
[Deuteronomy 6:4-5]**

— I could rhyme that off without even thinking about it. And that's part of the problem: I would pray *without* thinking about it. But Jesus *knew* God, and thus his love was not just words. It was personal. I was fascinated, and wished I could know God like that.

Then a few days later, Jesus came walking along the shore, and called out to me and my brother James, and also to our buddies Simon and his brother Andrew. "Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people." Without hesitation, I dropped everything and went with him. So much for my dream about owning a fishing fleet. Jesus was already teaching me to dream about really important things in life. [see Mark 1:16-20]

For the next few weeks, we travelled with Jesus, listening as he spoke to the crowds, and watching as he healed the sick. Then, in the evenings around the fire, we would ask him all kinds of questions, and he would tell us in more detail about life in the kingdom of God.

Finally, he hit us with the big surprise: "OK, you've been watching and learning how I work. Now it's your turn." He put us in pairs, and set us out to the villages all around the area. It was the most scary thing I've ever done, and the most thrilling thing I've ever done. Whatever need we found among people, we tried to help. We spoke about how God loves people, and how God

wants us to love him — really love him, and follow his ways. I could see people’s eyes brighten up as they grasped this idea. Their heads lifted up as they paid attention; people who were bent over with discouragement and defeat straightened up tall. They had new hope, new life in them. This message of the kingdom of God was good news to them.

We prayed with people, and they were healed of their sickness. We cast our demons who were destroying people’s lives, and restored the people to wholeness. When we were all back together again, and we all shared our stories of what had happened, what a time of rejoicing that was! [See Mark 6:7-13, 30]

I was growing in my faith by leaps and bounds, but I still had some rough edges. Like the time I started to dream again... about the truly important things in life: *me!* My brother James and I came to Jesus and said, “Teacher, there is something we want you to do for us.”

Jesus asked us, “What is it?”

“When you sit on your throne in your glorious kingdom, we want you to let us sit with you, one at your right and one at your left.”

To this day, I don’t know if the look in Jesus’ eyes was one of amusement or sadness. In any case, it was clear we had no idea what we talking about. We had heard Jesus talk many times about life in the Kingdom of God, but obviously we had completely missed the point. He patiently went over it again, telling us that the kingdom of God was not about power and prestige; rather, it was about serving others. [see Mark 10:35-45]

Then there was the time I saw some stranger praying in the name of Jesus, and casting out demons. “What! Who does he think he is? He’s not one of our group.” So I went up to him, “Hey fella! Jesus appointed *us* as his workers, not you. So go mind your own business.”

I felt pretty good about my position: out of the millions of people in Israel, Jesus chose us twelve to do his work. We can’t let just any riff-raff come along and start messing around with the kingdom of God. It’s only for certain chosen people.

Once again, Jesus had to set me straight. He told me not to be so narrow and exclusive. “Whoever is not against you is for you” is the way he put it. [see Luke 9:49-50]

Our home is in northern Israel, around the Sea of Galilee. Jesus was taking us south to Jerusalem, to worship at the Temple, and tell the people there about

the kingdom of God. It’s about a three-day walk to get to Jerusalem, as the crow flies. But that means going through Samaria. People who live there are called Samaritans, and they are a wicked people. They claim to worship the Lord God, but they’re fakes. We Jews have nothing to do with them. So to get to Jerusalem, we usually cross the Jordan River and walk on the other side, just so we don’t have to pollute ourselves by getting near those filthy people. It adds another day to the journey, but it’s worth it.

To our surprise, Jesus takes the direct route through Samaria. He considers them in the same family as Jews, and doesn’t hesitate to talk to Samaritans. We were going to stay in this one Samaritan village, and tell them about the kingdom, but when they learned we were Jews going to Jerusalem, they told us to get lost. (Their opinion of Jews is about the same as our opinion of them.)

This was a real insult to Jesus. We shouldn’t let them get away with that. So I asked Jesus, “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?” After all, the Bible tells us that’s what the great prophet Elijah did with people who didn’t show proper respect for God’s messenger.

Once again, Jesus rebuked me. We just went to a different village instead. [see Luke 9:51-56]

You’d think after three years of being with Jesus, I’d have the idea. However, even then, I still didn’t get it. I didn’t know it at the time, but when we ate the Passover meal with Jerusalem one night, that would be his last supper with us, and he would be killed the next day. It wasn’t just me, mind you. All of us got into a big argument in the middle of the meal about which one of us is the greatest. Once again, Jesus told us — probably for about the hundredth time — that the kingdom of God is about helping others, serving others, loving others. [see Luke 22:24-27]

It finally started to sink in. Love. That’s what it’s all about: love. Love God, love others. Jesus had said that’s what the Bible is all about; you can sum it up in those four words: Love God, love others.

That night, they came and arrested Jesus. They rushed him through a mockery of a trial by our Jewish High Council, and naturally found him guilty of blasphemy against God. They took him to Pilate, the Roman governor, and pretty well forced Pilate to order him executed. I was there when they nailed him to the cross, and hung him there to die.

His mother Mary was there. Joseph, Mary's husband, had died, and she was going to be left alone. The custom in our land is for one of the sons to take their widowed mother into their home. So it should have been one of Jesus' brothers or sisters to do that. But instead, Jesus pointed to me and said to his mother, "This is your son." And he told me to take care of her like my own mother. I guess Jesus could see that I was starting to break out of my habit of dreaming great things about *me*, and that he could trust me with this most precious person. I was honoured. [see John 19:25-27]

Years later, when I was one of the last of the original disciples still alive, there were churches all over Israel and far beyond, even in Rome itself. I wrote some letters to the churches, encouraging them in the Lord Jesus. By then, Jesus' words about love had penetrated deep into my soul. I think I finally understood, at least a little bit. Here's what I said to them:

**1 John 4:7-12, 19-20, Today's English Version:**

Dear friends, let us love one another, because love comes from God. Whoever loves is a child of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. And God showed his love for us by sending his only Son into the world, so that we might have life through him. This is what love is: it is not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven.

Dear friends, if this is how God loved us, then we should love one another. No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in union with us, and his love is made perfect in us. . . .

We love because God first loved us. If we say we love God, but hate others, we are liars. For we cannot love God, whom we have not seen, if we do not love others, whom we have seen.

### **Next Steps:**

Ask yourself, "Where am I on the journey with Jesus?"  
For example:

- Do I read the Bible and let it speak to my heart?
- Do I make time to be with God daily?
- Am I enjoying life as a child of God?
- Am I more cheerful, and less easily irritated, than a year ago?
- Do I love—*really* love—God? How do I show that?
- Do I love—*really* love—other people? How do I show that? Can others tell?

You can make up your own questions as well, to suit your situation.