

**From Miserable Agony to Majestic Glory**

What was it like for John? His father had a successful fishing business. He thought he would be a fisherman. He happened to hear about another guy named John who was preaching at the Jordan River and baptizing people. He heard the Baptizer speaking about the coming Messiah who would make all things new and he, a fisherman, was hooked. One day, the Baptizer pointed and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Eventually, John told his father that he was quitting the fishing business in order to follow Jesus.

You know what it feels like. Although the details are different, Jesus hooked you in the waters of your baptism and you also have become a follower of Jesus.

What was it like for John? He heard Jesus talk about faith in the heart as the connection to God instead of simply keeping ceremonial laws. He tasted sweet wine that had been dirty water just a few moments earlier. He saw Jesus instantly heal the lame, the blind, the deaf. He served as a waiter for thousands of people while Jesus fed all of them with one sack lunch. Three times he saw Jesus speak and a dead person came back to life. He saw Jesus transfigured as the glory of God nearly blinded him. Even though he could not explain it, he knew that Jesus was God in the flesh.

You know what it's like. Although the details are different, the Holy Spirit has revealed those same miracles to you with such detail that you can see and believe that Jesus is God in the flesh, even though it does not make sense to human logic.

What was it like for John? He was ashamed of his nickname, "Son of Thunder." He and his brother wanted Jesus to send a lightning bolt to destroy some Samaritans who were not that kind to them. Jesus had to remind him that his goal was to save people, not kill them. He blushed to remember how he selfishly asked Jesus for a special seat of honor in God's kingdom, ahead of the other disciples. He cringed to recall how cowardly he was when he ran away to save his own skin while Jesus was arrested.

You know what it's like. Although the details are different, you and I also are ashamed of how we have disappointed Jesus with our selfishness and lack of love for others. We realize that instead of sending a bolt of lightning to destroy others, we deserve to be destroyed, separated from God for all eternity.

What was it like for John? He saw Jesus on trial before the Jewish leaders as they laughed at him, spit in his face and pummeled his head. He saw Jesus' body twisted in agony and pulling down on the spikes as he was pinned to a cross and had to struggle for each breath. Early in the morning a few days later, he heard Mary Magdalene scream that Jesus' body had been stolen. His legs raced as he rushed to the open tomb, only to find the grave clothes lying there undisturbed as if Jesus had evaporated through the cloths. That evening, Jesus physically appeared to the disciples. The first words spoke were not an angry scolding for not believing his Word. There was no punishment. Instead, he called them friends and said, "Peace be with you." Full forgiveness for free. Forty days later, he watched Jesus float up higher than the clouds after saying, "I will come back for you."

You know what it's like. Although the details are different, you also have seen Jesus suffer and die and rise and ascend. You have seen how Jesus suffered the punishment, the pain, the reality of hell that you and I deserved. You have seen the risen Christ prove that there really is life after death with a glorified body. You have heard Jesus speak to you, "Your sins are forgiven. Peace be with you. You have nothing to fear. I love you."

What was it like for John? He shared the good news of salvation through Jesus with others and was promptly thrown into prison and whipped. Then, his brother James was killed by the king. He saw his parents and other loved ones grow old and die. Again and again he heard reports of how all the other apostles, his comrades, were executed. He heard of the horrific executions of Christians in Rome as they were fed to hungry lions in the colosseum as thousands of people laughed and cheered their deaths. He knew what it was like to grow old as his hearing and sight got worse and worse. The feet that ran to the tomb on Easter morning now shuffled to walk across the room. He was a lonely man exiled on the island of Patmos, a preacher with no one to preach to. He knew what it was like to ask God, "Why, Lord? Why do your people suffer? Why am I still here?"

You know what it's like. Although the details are different, you know what it's like to try to share the love of Jesus and have others, even family members, bark at you in angry defiance. You know what it's like to say good-bye to loved ones who died far too young. You know what it's like to have your heart ache with emptiness as those around you are dying one by one. You know what it's like to see loved ones, even children, suffer. You know what it's like for your body to get older and slower. You know what it's like to be surrounded and haunted by disease and death. You know what it's like to cry out in anguish, "Why, God? Why?"

What was it like for John? God pulled back the invisible curtain separating life on earth from life in heaven and gave him a revelation of what was waiting on the other side. He saw that God's people would suffer such miserable agony on earth so that even those in heaven would ask, "How much longer can this last, O Lord?" But in his vision, he also saw that, in the end, Jesus and his people win.

On July 4 1952, 27-year-old Florence Chadwick stepped into the waters of the Pacific Ocean off Catalina Island, prepared to swim to the coast of California, 23 miles away. The weather was chilly and foggy so that she could hardly see the boats that accompanied her. After swimming for fifteen hours, she begged to be taken out of the water. Her mother, who was in one of the boats, urged her to keep going. She was close to shore and could make it. Insead, physically and emotionally exhausted, Florence stopped swimming and was pulled out. She could not continue. She quit. Then she learned that she had less than half a mile to go. At a news conference the next day she said, "All I could see was the fog.... if I could have seen the shore, I would have made it."

You know what it's like to live in a fog of trouble, worry, doubt, depression, health problems, unemployment, financial uncertainty, strained relationships...and the loss of loved ones. There are times when we feel overwhelmed and helpless, ready to quit. With the book of Revelation, Jesus shines through the fog so you can see what's ahead and how close you are. We do not need the book of Revelation to be saved. The first 65 books of the Bible tell us all we need to know about salvation through Jesus. The book of Revelation is a special gift of love from God to his Church, to you. God wanted you to know that miserable agony on this earth will be replaced with majestic glory in heaven.

Near the end of Revelation, John shared, "**Then I saw 'a new heaven and a new earth,' for the first heaven and the first earth had passed**

**away.**" In heaven everything will be new all the time and you'll be as happy as children unwrapping their presents at Christmas. "**And there was no longer any sea.**" The sea separates people from each other and can be very dangerous. In heaven, everyone will be united and there will not be anything to fear. John continued, "**I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem** (That's code language for believers, for you.), **coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.**" How happy, how eager, how excited a bride is to walk down the aisle and join her life with the man who loves her. In heaven, your heart will be filled with that joy all the time. "**And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.'**" Faith will be turned to sight as you see Jesus in all his divine glory smiling at you. "**He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.**" Our mortal minds can not grasp the peace, joy and happiness that is waiting for us.

John continued, "**He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.'**" Regardless of who is elected or how many laws are passed, there will be no heaven on earth. But there most certainly will be a heaven after earth. This is not just some pious pie-in-the-sky, think happy thoughts, ignore reality wish. This is your living Savior's promise to you. Again, John, "**He said to me: 'It is done.** [Salvation is already accomplished.] **I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life.**" When the kings and kingdoms, presidents and politicians, countries and cultures are gone, Jesus will still be there giving you the water of salvation that you eagerly crave.

What was it like for John? You know what it's like. Just like John, you are sinner saved by God's eternal love. Just like John, you know that you are headed from miserable agony to majestic glory. All praise to God alone! Alleluia! Amen!