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Presentation Transcript
God's Greatest Miracle
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What is your favorite, most spectacular miracle? Well, that's easy. It's when Christ turned water into wine. Everyone knows that! Right? That's what somebody told me once. When I was a little boy I favored David rocking the giant. That was a good one. And then there was God's defeat of the Assyrian army in the time of Hezekiah. He prayed and the next morning there were 180,000 dead Assyrian soldiers laying on the bedrolls. Noah's flood is another one. Opening of the Red Sea. That was pretty spectacular. Some consider the all-time miracle to be the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But there's one other miracle that, to me, is far more astounding, far more incredible, far more mysterious, and much, much harder to believe. And I'd like to explain that miracle to you today.

Now this miracle can't be explained by reading one passage because it's mentioned in many places in the Bible. In fact it's woven all the way through the New Testament. So I'm going to have to spend the entire sermon in explaining this one miracle. And I thought that just reading the scriptural references would be boring. So I thought an illustration of this miracle would get the point across in a more interesting fashion. So the illustration of this miracle centers around the life of a single man. His name was John.

We're going to start with Jesus in this exposition of this miracle. Jesus was 30 and He moved from Nazareth to Capernaum. Capernaum was on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Back then they called it the Sea of Gennesaret, but today the Sea of Galilee. It was a trading and fishing center. And let's turn to Matthew 4 and verse 18.

Matt. 4:18 - *...walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And He said to them, Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they immediately left their nets and followed Him. Going from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, (this is our man – John) in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, and they immediately left the boat and their father and followed Him. So there were two fishermen – Simon and Andrew – and then there was a man named Zebedee who had two sons – James and John. And it sounds a little unusual when you read this*

account because it sounds like there's this guy walking along the shore of the lake, and He yells out to some stranger fishing, "Hey, you two in the boat. Over here. Right now!" And then a few minutes later He sees two more, and He says, "Hey you. Over here. Right now!" That's not really quite how it happened though. It wasn't that way at all. If we read other accounts...let's look in Luke 5, beginning in verse 1.

Lk. 5:1 – It says, *Now it came about while the multitude were pressing around Him, and listening to the Word of God, He was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret.* So Jesus is talking to this crowd and they keep pushing in on Him – you know, crowding Him. And you know what happens when that happens. The people further away can't hear. So *He saw two boats lying at the edge of the lake, but the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets. And He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's – so He knew Simon. Right? – and asked him to put out a little way from the land. And He sat down and began to teach the multitude from the boat.* Have you ever been fishing out on a lake, and there's fishermen in another boat, and they're talking in a low voice? They might be 100 yards away and you can still hear every word they're saying? Their sound carries well on water. So Jesus was a sound techy. And He knew how to make His voice carry without electronic amplification. And that's what He did. And it says, *When He finished speaking, He said to Simon, Put out into the deep water and let down your net for a catch. And Simon said, Master – see, there's another clue that he knew Him – we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but yet at your bidding I will let down the nets. And when they had done this they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break. And they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw that he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For amazement had seized him and all his companions for the catch of fish which they had taken, and so also James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, Do not fear. From now on you will be catching men.* So Peter and Andrew and James and John were all involved in this event. And it says in verse 11,

V-11 – *When they brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him.* So four men – two sets of brothers – who were partners in a fishing business – Peter and Andrew, James and John. Did you know that today, if you go to the Sea of Galilee, if you go to Capernaum, or any of the little restaurants along the edge of the lake, and you go into those restaurants you can order a fish dinner off the menu called St. Peter's Fish? You can.

Now before all this happened, the Bible tells us that these four men already knew that Christ was the Messiah. So it wasn't just come up and call these guys and follow me right now. And we can see that in John 1 and verse 35.

Jn. 1:35 – It says, *Again the next day John – and that's not our John; this is John the Baptist – was standing with two of his disciples. And he looked upon Jesus as He walked and said, Behold, the Lamb of God.* "There He is. That's the One I've been telling you about. He's the Messiah." *And the two disciples (of John the Baptist) heard him speak and they followed Jesus. And Jesus turned and beheld them following, and said, What do you seek? And they said to Him, Rabbi, Where are you staying? And He said to them, Come and you will see. And*

they came therefore and saw where He was staying, and they stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. And one of two who heard John speak and followed Him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. Okay now, one of the two was Andrew, who was Simon Peter's brother. Who was the other one? Well, which Gospel are we reading? We're reading the Gospel of John. And the one thing that all the scholars have noted about John is – in his Gospel and in his books – he never calls himself by name. So he'll say, "That disciple," and he's talking about himself. So he was one of the two who saw this.

Jn. 1:41 – Continuing on it says, *He – that is, Andrew – found first his own brother Simon, and said to him, We found the Messiah. And he brought him to Jesus, and Jesus looked at him, and said, You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas, which is translated Peter.* So this Simon is the one who Jesus called Peter, and the same one who wrote the books of Peter in the New Testament. He's the Apostle Peter.

V-43 – *The next day He purposed to go forth into Galilee, and he found Philip, and Jesus said to him, Follow Me. Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter.* So Philip knew them. Capernaum and Bethsaida were towns close together on the bank of Gennesaret, or the Sea of Galilee.

V-45 – It says, *Philip found Nathanael and said to him, We found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. And Nathanael said, How can any good thing come out of Nazareth? And Philip said to him, Come and see. And Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him – he did come and see – and He said, Behold, an Israelite in whom is no guile. And Nathanael said to Him, How do you know me? And Jesus said, Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you. And Nathanael answered Him, Rabbi, You are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel. And Jesus said to him, Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, you believed? You are going to see greater things than that.* He's kind of teasing him a little bit about his...he's sort of a wide-eyed naïve kind of a guy.

So some of these people knew Christ before then were called. They were not total strangers. And we can also make a really strong case that Jesus and our man John were first cousins. John's mother's name was Salome. And the scripture indicates that Salome was the sister of Mary. So they were friends. They were associates in work. They were related by blood. They grew up together in a small community. So the point of all that is, that before Jesus said, "I want you," He knew all of these people. And they knew Him. And they knew each other. And they probably had known each other, and had known Him, for a long time. So it wasn't just a blind collection of different people.

So what was this John like. He's the focus of our attention today. There's a miracle associated with him. Let's get better acquainted with the man John.

Mk. 3:17 – It says, *And James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother – the brother of James – to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means Sons of Thunder.* Why did He call them Sons of Thunder? Had a deep voice? No, I don't think so. Let's look in Luke 9:46.

Lk. 9:46 – *An argument arose among them – among the disciples – as to which of them might be the greatest. They were a humble lot. But Jesus, knowing what they were thinking in their heart, took a child and stood him by His side, and said to them, Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me. For He who is the least among you, this is the one who is great.* A great lesson in humility. Now notice what John said. This lesson is going to blow by John so fast. It was like electric. I mean, he didn't get it at all. *And John answered and said, Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to hinder him because he doesn't follow along with us. And Jesus said to him, Do not hinder him. For he who is not against you, is for you.* You know, John was the kind of guy that because this man didn't fit his rather rigid idea of what a disciple should be, he was ready to get rid of him. You know, "It's my way or the highway." Unchanging, rigid, narrow-minded. I heard a term *binary* once. And I heard it applied to thinking – binary thinking. *Binary* is a term that is used in computers – the most elementary level. All the information on a computer is either a 1 or a 0. It's either on, or it's off. And some people think that way. It's either good or bad. It's either "my way or no way." You know, a digital clock...it's either twelve o'clock (12:00) or it's not. That's digital, binary approach. You know, when you have an analog clock you can see the second moving toward zero, and it's only there for a very short time. But you can see the movement. And there's allowance for close to or far away from – distance. But when it's digital, it's either twelve o'clock or it's not. And in John's mind this guy was either with us or he wasn't. And since he wasn't, get rid of him. That's how he thought about things.

I invited a man to church once who had rather long, scruffy hair. And he didn't know much about how to dress either, as I remember. But I figured that the brethren would rub off on him, and he would gradually learn and read his Bible and learn about that stuff. But, you know, one of the members told this man his first week of services – this is a direct quote, folks – "If I were the minister, I would boot you out." Sort of a modern day Boanerges. It kind of gets the picture across, doesn't it? Strict, rigid, right or wrong.

Let's look at another thing that helps us understand what John was like.

Lk. 9:51 – *It came about when the days were approaching for His ascension, that He resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem.* This is talking about Jesus. *And He sent messengers on ahead of Him, and they went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make arrangements for Him. And they did not receive Him because He was journeying with His face toward Jerusalem. And when His disciples James and (our man) John saw this they said, Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?* "I mean, you just say the word, and we'll be happy to do that for You. You know, a little well-placed napalm would solve the problem, Lord." So not only is he rigid and self-righteous, he's punitive. He's vindictive. He's vengeful. And he is unyielding.

I'm really going to give away my age now. There used to be a show in the mid-80s. It was called *Hill Street Blues*. Did you ever see that show? All the people my age are nodding their heads, and all the ones that aren't have this blank look on their faces. I said I was going to give away my age. It was a police show. And they had a SWAT team leader. You remember him? He was an unbalanced, fanatical, hot-dog type guy. His style was overkill. Remember

him? That was our man, John. That's what he was like. Have you ever seen somebody go off on someone? Where does that come from? I'm right, you're wrong. You need to be punished and I'm just the one to do it. That's the spirit of Boanerges at work today. It's still with us.

Let's look at another portrayal of John. It's in Mark 10, verse 35.

Mk. 10:35 – *James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came to Him saying, Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you. And He said to them – a very good question – What do you want Me to do for you? And they said to Him, [Oh, nothing much, we just want You to] Grant that we may sit with You in glory, one on Your right hand and one on Your left. “Jesus, do us a favor.” “What do you want?” “Oh, nothing much really, we just want a position of control over our friends and relatives forever. That’s all.” You know, they weren’t noisy like Peter. They weren’t doubtful like Thomas. They weren’t naïve like Nathanael. They were just political, manipulative, competitive and selfish. That’s what our man was like.*
V-38 – *But Jesus said to them – they had one other characteristic, by the way, and this brings it out – You do not know what you’re asking for. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized? And they said to Him – without a moment’s hesitation – We are able. And Jesus said to them, The cup that I drink you shall drink, and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized.* So not only were they rigid, self-righteous, binary, political, manipulative, competitive and selfish, they had also way overestimated their own strength, skill and righteousness. They were cock-sure and arrogant. We're not painting a very pretty picture here, are we?

Jn. 13:22 - This is an amazing scripture. He had just finished talking to them about how He was going to be betrayed, and it says, *Then the disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom He had spoken. Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved.* Now which Gospel are we reading? John. Our man wrote this book. And remember, we learned that when he talked about himself in his own writings he never mentioned his own name. So Jesus loved John. He loved Boanerges. He loved the Son of Thunder. He liked the guy that wanted to bring down fire and fry people up crisp. Why? Why was John special to Jesus? Well that's an interesting question, isn't it? Doesn't that come home to all of us? Because don't we all see a little bit of ourselves when we talk about what John was like?

Jn. 19:25 – This is during the crucifixion of Christ. *Therefore the soldiers did these things. But there were standing by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas and Mary Magdalene.* Now His mother's sister would be who? That would be Salome. *And when Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved, standing nearby – so there he is again not mentioning his own name – He said to His mother, Woman, behold your son. And then He said to the disciple, Behold your mother. And from that hour the disciple took her into his own household.* So remember that Mary was John's aunt, and for all John's faults, he was responsible. So the Son of Thunder wound up caring for Jesus' mother after He died.

Many people have trouble understanding how Jesus could draw so close to somebody who was so judgmental and condemning. Surely John must have been hard to love. You know,

when we see these characteristics in other people, it does make them unlovable to us. And when we see them in ourselves, we don't feel good about them. And we can tell by the reaction of others when we act like John acted. They don't like us either. He must have been hard to love. But the key to understand how this could happen – how Jesus could love John – is to realize that God's kind of love is not like our kind of love at all. Human love seeks something in return, but God's love focuses on the other person.

Think about what Jesus was like in His physical life. He seemed to have been attracted to dirty beggars, lepers, poor people. He loved Mary Magdalene, who was an ex-prostitute, who in the beginning was unrefined and emotionally unbalanced. He loved Peter who always said the wrong thing. He loved negative Thomas. He loved naïve Nathanael. He loved the tax collector. He loved the traitor. And he loved the lawyer. God sees the specialness that He's created in each one of us. We're all different. We all have good things about us. And Jesus saw something special in John. He saw what was special in John. And He loved John for that.

We don't know much about John after the death of his friend, Jesus. We know that John and Peter worked together at first. They were good friends. Paul tells us years later that John was a pillar in the Church. We know that after Mary died John left Jerusalem and avoided the destruction of the city in 69-70 AD. Tradition tells us that the Emperor Domitian submerged John in boiling oil, but he came out unhurt. That's a tradition about John. We know that he was exiled by Rome to the island of Patmos in the Mediterranean. We know that in his old age he was the last living apostle. He outlasted all of them. And back when people died at 45 and 50 and 55, John lived into his 90s, which is interesting. For quite a good bit of time, I would imagine, after the rest of them died he tried to hold the floundering church together.

III John 1:9 – It says, *I wrote something to the church but Diotrephes, who loved to be first among them, does not accept what we say.* So there was a breakdown in structure in the church. The people that were the original apostles by some were repudiated and rejected. He said, *For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words. And not satisfied with this, neither does he himself receive the brethren, and he forbids those who desire to do so, and puts them out of the church.* So you have a false minister disfellowshipping the true members of the church. Pretty chaotic situation.

We believe John died in the 90s of natural causes – the only of the twelve who avoided martyrdom. The only one. Now we might ask, “Where's the miracle in all this?” Well, we saw what he was like in the beginning. What was he like in the end? John wrote five books of the Bible. He wrote the Gospel of John. He wrote the book of Revelation. And he wrote I, II, and III John. It's interesting to me that *Unger's Bible Dictionary* tells us that the main focus of his gospel was Christ's love for man. Isn't that interesting? That's our first clue really. Rather unusual, don't you think, for a judgmental man, who wanted to bring down fire on those who defended him to write a book that focuses on Christ's love for man.

I John is a short book. But you know that book has been called the most profound book in the Bible – written by a fisherman. The most profound book in the Bible. And what is the subject of that book? Godly love. People have said that is the most profound writing on the subject of

love that has ever been written by a human being. Even people who are not believers in God admit that I John is the deepest work that's ever been written on the subject. Doesn't it strike you odd that God would use a Son of Thunder to write his masterpiece on love? In I John 2 and verse 5 John explains.

I Jn. 2:5 – *But whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him.*

There's two ways to be an expert at something. You can be born with it, or you can learn it. When you think about sports, there are those people that are just natural athletes, and then there's other people that develop great proficiency, but they have to think their way through it every step of the way. Now those people that are born with it never have to learn, and they generally are not able to teach other people how to do it, because they never had to learn. It was just second nature to them. My brother, when he was 8, went to a birthday party with some friends and they went down to a shooting range and shot BB guns at targets. And all of his shots were in an area about the size of your little finger nail. The other kids were all over the... He couldn't explain how to do that to anybody, because he can just *do* it. He's just that way. I can't do it. That's an example of what we're talking about. But those people that have to learn it, they can teach others too, because they had to think their way through it every step of the way. Love was not natural to John. We see that in his early life.

There's another thing to think about here, too. Have you ever listened to a real expert talk in his area of expertise? Henry Coffman on interest rates? Or Milton Freedman on economics? The essence of genius, when you listen to guys like this is simplicity. People that are experts and geniuses lumped together can express the most complicated ideas in very simple terms.

I Jn. 3:10 – Listen to what John said here. *By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious. Anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. For this is the message which you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.* This is not new. It's not rocket science. It's simple. And yet it's so hard for some people to discern the children of God from the children of the devil. People get taken in by the devil's representatives all the time. But John said, "You know, it's not hard to understand. It's simple." In fact, stating it that way is about as elegantly simple as it gets, isn't it?

So John went into the Church as a Son of Thunder, and sixty years later he came out the Apostle of Love. How did that happen? God did not *make* John do anything, did He? He never laid a hand on him. And yet he was changed completely over the course of his life. He was more like God in the end. Now, is that not more of a miracle than turning a jug of water into wine? I know there are people that I'd *really* like to change. You have those people, too, don't you? And you know, we are totally helpless to do that, aren't we? Parents want to change their kids. Kids want to change their parents. We have people we can't get along with, and we can't do a thing about it, can we? Ultimately, it's all out of our control. And it's not just us. We're not the only ones that are astounded by this kind of transformation that God can cause in people. The scriptures tell us that angels observe what God is doing with immense curiosity and wonder. They periodically fall on their faces in awe and worship incredulous at

God's greatest miracle. Prophets of old intently studied to penetrate the mystery of this miracle. And here's what Paul says about it in Colossians 1:25.

Col. 1:25 – *...of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is the mystery which has been hidden from past ages and generations, but has now been made manifest to His saints. To whom God will to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. We, who are just mortal, fleshly beings, have the opportunity to become like Christ in mind and body and live forever with a body composed of spirit and a mind based on love.*

Now, this miracle is much more personal to us than the Red Sea or Noah's flood, because this miracle can happen to us. This miracle is what life is all about. It's what the church is all about. It's what Jesus Christ is all about. But how did God perform this miracle in the life of John? I mean, that's really what we want to know, isn't it? How did He turn a jug of water into wine? How did He part the Red Sea? How did He take somebody that was a Son of Thunder and turn him into an Apostle of Love? How did the mind of Christ get inside John? How did John become loving like Christ?

We don't know why John was so judgmental and hostile. Usually when that happens it's because the person has been wounded in the past. So, what did God do? Did He wave a magic wand over a judgmental John, and suddenly heal his inner self? Changing him into kindness and love? Kind of by magic? We would all very much like to believe this because it absolves us of having to do anything. It leaves us out of participation in any change process. We don't have to take any responsibility. We can blame it on somebody else, and feel justified in our faults, and God's going to fix it all for us. But unfortunately this is not how John was changed by God.

I'd like you to think about what happened to John? After Christ ascended on Pentecost things, it's clear, were pretty super-charged in the Church, weren't they? Lots going on. 5,000 people baptized. One day you've got a church of 120, the next day you've got a church of 5,000. That's going to stress any minister – any twelve ministers. So everybody was really revved up and excited, but as time passed, things calmed down, didn't they? Those kind of miracles gradually faded out unto the point later John was having to take care of ministers that were lying about him and disfellowshipping the true people from the Church. Sometime in between those two extremes there was life as usual. And the apostles had to get down to doing the job of the Work. They traveled a lot. John undoubtedly had time to think. As he worked with God's people, I'm sure that he had an opportunity to reflect on how Christ acted in similar situations as he saw Him minister to people. He may have recalled the time he wanted to call down fire from heaven, and the disappointment in Christ's face when he said that. Maybe he thought about the time he rebuked the man who cast out the demons and was, himself, gently corrected for it. Maybe he compared the way Christ dealt with him to the way he dealt with others. And he probably, somewhere along the line, realized that he wasn't quite as good as he thought he was when he said he was ready and able to follow Christ no matter what happened to him. I'm certain the crucifixion helped him understand that he wasn't up to that.

So, somewhere along the line, he probably resolved that he was going to have to make some changes if he was going to do what he said that he would do in the beginning. And as he resolved to make those changes, he undoubtedly failed repeatedly. He probably had to rededicate himself over and over again. Because you don't just flip a switch and turn from a Son of Thunder to an Apostle of Love. We don't root out of ourselves, and God doesn't root out of us by magic, deeply held, deeply ingrained, hard-wired habits in thinking. He had to pray. He had to rethink his behaviors. He had to rethink his reactions to other people. He had to compare himself to Jesus Christ.

I Jn. 2:6 – *He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.* Look at the construction of thought. How do you think he knew that? You know, there is that *he* and *him* in there again. He's talking from experience here, isn't he? He had to learn how to love. "He who *says* he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked." This is a guy that was very unloving, and he had to learn *how* to love. And so a slow metamorphosis took place in his life. And after years of struggle, guided by God's Spirit, John changed. He became different. He became different in a way that astounds angels.

Col. 3:8 – Paul said that the gospel was the illumination of this miraculous process. *But now you also*, he says in Colossians 3:8, *put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.* This is the process that John participated in. He put on the new man. And the results of his meditations are in the book of I John.

What powered that miracle, do you think? What makes God's love such a powerful motivator? Here's what I think. When I lived in California, I was the pastor of a large urban congregation, and I worked with a bunch of teenagers that at first were quite disenfranchised and distant, but I gradually was able to make connections with them. And after we really got things rolling the right way, one day one of the older teenage girls walked up to me and out of the clear blue, she said, "How do you do it?" And I said, "Do what?" And she said, "Well, you love all the same, but you make us all feel special." And I thought, "How did I do that?" And I got to thinking about how I was working with those children, and what I realized was, I was focusing on what was special about each one of them. And that's what they were responding to. I treated them all the same, but I honored them, each one, for their own specialness that was in them. And I believe that as John rested his head on Christ's chest at Passover, he, in spite of all of his problems, he knew that Jesus Christ knew something about him that was good – something that was special – and he understood what it felt like to be loved by God. And as he got older, and he saw how truly ungodly he was, he could understand even more what Godly love really is. As it became clear to him how much he needed to change, the debt that he owed God kept getting bigger. He knew that for all his faults, and the list just seemed to keep growing as he understood more, Jesus saw something about John that others didn't see. And He loved him while he was still a Son of Thunder. And I think that love is what had such a profound impact on John. It changed him forever. He knew that Christ saw past all the hurts and the hostility, and past the anger and the rigidity to his core – to the things that made John unique and special in all the universe. And I think, too, that He knew that John had the *potential* to be the Apostle of Love. And I think John knew

how it felt to be loved that way, and how it filled his deepest longing, and how it lifted him up and energized him spiritually to be a better person. I mean, that is the working of the Holy Spirit, isn't it?

So the challenge for all humans is to live well despite the past, isn't it? We don't know what happened to John in his past to make him the way he was. The past infects us like a virus. But Christ's love for John helped him rise above his past. And the really wonderful part about all of this is, this miracle is not unique to John. It's happening to all of God's children. It's happening to you. It's happening to me. Of course, we have to participate in the process. God wants us to love each other as He loves us. And in so doing, then we become more like God. That's the process. Of course, we know that we can never get very close to Godly love as long as we're human. Our efforts are doomed to failure on our own, but that's okay. It's the *effort* that God needs from us. That's what He wants. And to be apprehended of God, like John was – to be changed by God – that's a *slow and a painful* process. It doesn't happen overnight. We make some of the most disheartening mistakes. We can get discouraged and negative. The hurts of the past can overtake us. It's easy, in times of trial, to fall back into the old anger, the old self pity, the old sadness, the old guilt. And when all these setbacks occur, we would be wise to remember the victorious life of John, because that same victory is offered to us. He went into the process as a Son of Thunder, and sixty years later he came out of the process as the Apostle of Love.