

THE “SON OF THUNDER” INTO THE “APOSTLE OF LOVE”

MISCELLANEOUS TEXTS

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There is a story that describes an old man. The years of hard work and the natural weakening of bone density, and a number of other ailments had combined to render him stooped and his appearance was frail. His years of hard work resulted in him having a prosperous living and in his older years he lived in a fine house that had a beautiful garden on the grounds. He decided that he would take an old photograph of himself that was taken when he was in the prime of manhood and have a statute made and place it by the pond in his flower garden. The statute was sculptured and positioned as directed. Every day the old man would walk through the garden and gaze at the statute. He did this often and slowly changes began to occur - his stooped back was slightly straighter, his bowed shoulders were regaining their correct posture, even his face began to display the spry countenance of earlier years. Over a period of time these changes continued until at last the old man had become totally different than what he was! The transformation was amazing but undeniable.

Another story that illustrates the amazing transformation that man seeks is called “The Sheep Thief and the Saint.” This has several variations but presents a very good point.

This version is reported to come from an original story in Chinese by Prof. Lee Chack-fan that was retold by Raymond Lam.

In Old Scotland, from a century long past...“That shall teach you to steal sheep from Mister Dunn again, scummy ingrates!” bellowed three burly men. They grabbed William and Christopher and threw them out of the sweltering blacksmith’s shop. The brothers wailed in pain, writhing on the ground and clutching their heads as the crowd around them jeered and shouted insults at them. On their foreheads were branded two red-hot letters. 🗡️ “ST.”

“Sheep thieves! Sheep thieves!”

“You got some gall to take animals that belong to the laird of the land! Get your pitiful screeching faces outta our village, sheep thieves, and don’t come back!”

Christopher faded in and out of consciousness. He and William had made a wretched mistake. The two brothers were born into poverty and destined to work the land in bonded servitude like their father and their father before him. In desperation, they had broken into the vast estate of the laird Dunn, the wealthiest landowner in the entire region. They had jumped over a paddock on Dunn’s extensive farm, which stretched for acres upon acres with no end in sight. Surely he wouldn’t notice the theft of two measly sheep? It would have made a world of difference to Christopher and William’s starving family.

Alas, Dunn’s groundskeeper noticed. And Dunn was an unforgiving laird. Better that a sheep feed him for a night’s feast with fellow gentlemen, than to feed a common

family for a whole month. No one in the village dared to stand up to Dunn, and despite their poverty the villagers were desperate enough to at least appear to Dunn's enforcers that they were loyal and happy to fight for the crumbs from his table, so that they might be rewarded or at least not be harmed like William and Christopher.

Now the brothers' shame would live forever on their faces. They were sheep thieves, and that was all that they'd ever be.

Later that night in a hay-stacked hovel on the outskirts of the village, William was cradling his face, his forehead still sizzling in agonizing pain from the brand that had just marked him out to be a criminal. Christopher had broken down and fled, screaming at the unfairness of the world. He was never seen again. Some suggest that the burden of his life was too great and he committed suicide. William was in too much pain to stop him and feared that his dear brother was lost forever. But as his aching skull finally cooled somewhat, and he could feel the fresh, crisp eventide air kissing and comforting his flesh, his thoughts cleared and he felt much more mindful of what had happened.

"I can hate Dunn," he growled to himself, gritting his teeth. "But the stars and sky denied me his property. I can't fight the heavens." Tears rolled down his face. He could let revenge consume him. He could, somehow, amass great power and wealth, raise a private army, and pillage Dunn's estate and even topple Dunn. He could even become a laird himself, the most honored of all Scottish gentlemen.

But for what? How would it take away the shame?

Or, perhaps, he could start all over again. But this terrible brand, "ST," would stay with him for the rest of his life. Yes, to regain his dignity was the only way forward. And winning back dignity meant repentance, remorse. His tears had dried as he sat up from his haystack, smiling for the first time in days.

It wasn't easy, heading back to his village and offering to make amends to anyone who didn't spit in his face or punch him in the gut. At first, only a few let him do menial tasks - carry these baskets of fruit, or fix this leaking rooftop. No one initially trusted him around livestock. But then, as he continued to selflessly perform his unpaid jobs, he was allowed to care for chickens and dogs, before, to everyone's surprise, one of the farmers even let him look after his sheep and horses. He never asked for a penny. He took all sorts of odd jobs, from sunrise to sundown, even helping to clean cottages and help midwives deliver infants.

At first, the villagers looked at William in puzzlement and distrust. Then, after a couple of years of getting used to his help, their faces relaxed. In a decade or so, they broke into delighted smiles whenever they saw him. After tirelessly making amends for many years, he was being invited to the tavern to cook food for guests. Music and dance surrounded him, and soon after he was dancing with the villagers. The entire village seemed brighter and kinder, even braver. Even Dunn found that he could no longer bully people to get his way. He had to ask nicely.

It was more than thirty years later when an English noblewoman, Julie Bedford, came to the Dunn estate. Dunn had passed away a long time ago. After visiting her kin and grandchildren, Lady Bedford went to the village. As she walked, she noticed a wrinkled old man, gnarled and frail, yet surrounded by adoring adults and children alike. His eyes were full of joy and his smile radiant as he conversed with the people who fought for his attention. His calloused hands, weathered and swollen from decades of manual labor, clapped to the singing in the town.

On his forehead were two faded letters, made by a fearsome brand many years ago: "ST."

"Sir," Bedford asked a man, "I pray thee tell me, why does that old fellow have the letters "S" and "T" seared on his forehead? Was he a sinner or knave of some sort?"

"Oh, Saint Will?" barked the bartender, laughing. "Nothin' less than the most beloved elder of the whole village!"

She blinked in surprise. "Saint?"

"Well, maybe. Maybe not. It was such a long time ago, so no one remembers. But you know wha'? No one cares. ☞ We all think "ST" stands for Saint! Such is the good and blessed man he is, and we love and cherish him."

Lady Bedford looked back at the old man, who seemed to have tears of happiness rolling down his wrinkled cheeks. She briefly wondered what might have happened in the distant past. But she didn't need to know.

THE BLESSING OF TRANSFORMATION

The Christian is one who enjoys the blessings of transformation. ☞ That which we are today will become eclipsed by what we become tomorrow. ☞ Christianity is a "becoming" experience (Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 5:8-16).

1. "Change" "Transform" is a striking word in the Greek. It comes from a term (μεταμορφωω, METAMORPHOO) that suggests a change occurs in the Christian. This change begins invisibly but becomes obvious.
2. This transformation touches every aspect of our life - "all things are new."
3. The end result of this transformation is most encouraging because it demonstrates the obvious difference of what one was and what he has become (Philemon 11; Romans 6:17-18, 20-21; 1 Timothy 1:12-17 occurred because of 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; etc.).
4. This remarkable transformation provides grounds for great joy in the Christian. Because of the transforming power of the Gospel, the Christian is ☞ NO LONGER bound by the guilt of sinful choices (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). The joy results because the Christian is progressing, changing, transforming all of life into the blessed image of our Lord!

THE ILLUSTRATION OF TRANSFORMATION

One of the best illustrations of the transforming power of the Lord Jesus Christ comes from one we often fail to consider. The Apostle John is often immediately associated as the "Apostle of love." However, here was a man who was known as anything BUT "loving" in his early years. Even after he was called by Christ, he needed dramatic transformation of his life.

1. 🗝️ He was the son of Zebedee and the brother of James. He was a fisherman and growing up among the fishing industry he would have been exposed to the roughest, rudest rouses that society produced - bad language, ill-manners, pride in mortal strength would all have been a part of those in this group. Even though tempered by the profession, John was religiously minded. He was a disciple of John (John 1:35-40). He possessed a sincere heart and loyalty that made him a part of the "inner-circle" of Christ's disciples (joined by Peter and James). John was perhaps closer to the Lord than any other disciple (John 13:12-25; 19:26-27; 20:1-10; 21:20-21).
2. Four traits of John's disposition are highlighted by Scripture. The traits are uncomplimentary and we can see the influence of the "fishing dock." However, they BECOME complimentary as John associated with Christ.
3. The Apostle BEFORE his association with Christ.

a. 🗝️ **VIOLENT TEMPER (Luke 9:51-56)**

Seeing the insults given to Christ, John was instantly angered. As suddenly and shattering as thunder, so John erupted (Mark 3:17, "He gave the name Boanerges, which means, 'Sons of Thunder'"). Here was one with an explosive temper and would quickly "thunder" against wrong.

b. 🗝️ **WORLDLY AMBITION (Matthew 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45)**

He shared a desire which many demonstrate. To him possession of worldly positions was the most important goal in life.

c. 🗝️ **BIASED INTOLERANCE (Mark 9:39-40; Luke 9:49-50)**

He jealously guarded what he thought was the right way. His interests lay in that his "party" would be recognized and thus receive all of the honor.

d. 🗝️ **DYSFUNCTIONAL LOVE (1 John 2:15)**

He was "loving" (had strong affections) but it was all directed toward the world.

4. The Apostle 🗝️ AFTER his association with Christ.

John was exposed to Christ's words, observed Christ's behaviors, was rebuked by Christ's authority and told to change his behavior. These actions resulted in an amazing transformation. He was physically the same man and he still had the same character traits of one growing up on "the docks." However, these traits had undergone an amazing transformation. Notice how the transformation of John causes us to think of him foremost as the "Apostle of love" instead of the "son of

thunder." His amazing transformation is clearly seen in his words of the General Epistles bearing his name.

a. It transformed his SOCIAL skills - violent temper was transformed!

No longer did he allow his explosive temper to erupt. John's outrage no longer was kindled by personal insults. Now John's thundering anger was directed toward those who insulted the Almighty God (1 John 2:18-19; 2 John 9-11; 3 John 9-12). 2 John 9-11, "Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God...If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting...for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds."

What stirs YOUR anger?

b. ☞ It transformed his PURPOSE in life - ambition was redirected!

John's ambition was no longer for worldly possessions or worldly status. Now the Apostle strove for the highest spiritual values and eternal welfare (John 20:30-31; 1 John 4:1,4; 2 John 4-6; 3 John 2-4). Amazingly, John's own words urged his brethren to avoid the trap of worldly ambition into which he had earlier fallen (1 John 2:15-17).

2 John 4-6, "I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment to do from the Father. Now I ask you, lady, not as though I were writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it."

What is your consuming "ambition" in life?

c. ☞ It transformed his DEVOTION - jealousy was redirected!

After following Christ, learning from Christ, and witnessing Christ's life, John's intolerance was directed toward those who sought to compromise God's absolute Truth (1 John 2:4,6,19; 2 John 7,10; 3 John 10-11). John understood a fact that many in our modern culture ignore - God expects His people to practice an intolerance! (1 John 2:18-23). John was zealous for the Truth regarding Christ Jesus. He was urgent in pressing people to have the right attitude regarding Christ Jesus. He did not hesitate to point out where error was leading some away from the Truth. He did not silently sit as error was advocated. He had accompanied the Lord Christ and his loyalty was no longer fixed upon his own jealously guarded ideals but was now devoted to the Lord's Truth!

1 John 2:4, "The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

How intolerant are you of spiritual modifications?

d. ☞ **It transformed his LOVE - serving replaced selfishness!**

John had exercised love previously (1 John 2:15ff) but after being transformed by the Lord, John's "love" was also changed (1 John 4:19; 2 John 6; 3 John 4). It was this "love" (αγαπε, agape) that was redirected - to WHAT are you willing to give and sacrifice? John came to realize that it was no longer Self but the Lord. This redirection of αγαπε transformed his entire life!

1 John 4:19, "We love, because He first loved us."

*Viewing the Apostle John by these four traits enables us to discover a marvelous understanding of the epistles of John. These are letters written by a man whose heart was firmly committed to Truth. He would never accept evil or advocate compromise. He would deftly teach/preach so that listeners would understand there is absolute Truth. His "love" would not have been the modern concept that silences the biblical demands and tolerates the intolerable in practice and belief. ☞ This view of the Apostle John explains why, and how, modern believers are to govern ambition, direct anger, and express intolerance in regard to spiritual issues, yet still be known as Christ's "beloved disciple." Such a concept is inconceivable to the post-modern mind but it is very biblical. A study of the Epistles of John helps us see how one can be loving but also be ambitious, angry, and even intolerant whenever the will of God is threatened (John L. Kachelman, Jr. *The Apostles: Their Life, Work, and Influence*. Third Annual Lectureship, Cold Harbor Road Church of Christ 2005, Mechanicsville, VA, 237-238).*

THE REQUIREMENT OF TRANSFORMATION

The life of the Apostle John illustrates the wonder of being transformed by the Gospel of Christ Jesus. However, we need to realize that this transformation is not optional. It is not limited to just John. It is required from ALL who obey the Gospel and become Christians. Throughout Scripture there is ☞ a constant urging that all Christians be transformed because of their association with Christ (Ephesians 4:17-32; 5:8; Titus 2:11-12; etc.). Notice just a few of these texts.

Titus 2:11-12, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age."

☞ 2 Corinthians 3:18

In the Old Testament it was Moses alone who was "changed" but in the New Testament it is to be the ENTIRE Church that is transformed. This transformation is to result in Christians being changed into the "same image" as Christ. The Christian's transformation occurs as he "beholds" Christ. This refers to a steady gaze and contemplation. Thus, the Christian "beholds" the Christ and contemplates HOW he is to become more Christ-like. The Christian is "shaped" into the glory of the Lord only

after this steady, constant study is made. Christians are thus "transformed" into the image of Christ only after their minds are filled with the Lord's wonder and will (Romans 12:1-2).

🔑 Colossians 3:5-17

The words describe the "before" and "after" of the Christian. There is a marked difference between the two positions. It is important to notice that this drastic difference occurs as the action in 3:10 is performed - "renewed." The term refers literally to a "renovation" or reconstruction. We identify this term with the drastic remodeling that is performed on buildings. The structure is "guttled" and redone. The outside remains the same but the inside is drastically changed. This "renovation" occurs only as Christians possess "knowledge." This "renovation" results in "not I but Christ living in me."

🔑 Galatians 5:16-26

The Christian's transformation is evident as he exchanges the "works of the flesh" for the "fruits of the Spirit."

Ephesians 2:1-22

The Christian's transformation is described in marvelous detail. Once a bitter enemy of God but the sacrifice of Christ offers reconciliation. The Christian is so transformed that the tragic conditions in (2:11-12) are erased and he becomes an intricate part of the spiritual Temple (2:19ff).

THE APPLICATION

🔑 Every Christian ought to look at their life and see an amazing transformation. You should be able to observe that you once were a "son of thunder" but now an "apostle of Love." You should be able to say that once you were "useless" but now you are "useful" (Philemon 11). You should wonderfully realize that once you practiced things of which 🔑 you are now ashamed and do everything you can to urge others not to repeat your mistakes (Romans 6:17; 1 Titus 1:12-17).

As we take this lesson home, apply it to your life with these specific points:

1. Romans 6:17-22, "But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed...For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification...For when you were slaves of sin...what benefit were you then...from the things of which you are now ashamed?...But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life."

🔑 The most wonderful blessing you can have on earth is a "Do-Over" of your choices. All have made some bad choices. All are embarrassed by previous actions.

All are ashamed of previous behaviors (Romans 3:23, "for all..."). If you do not feel this shame for previous actions, words, lifestyles, associations, habits, etc, then you cannot appreciate John's transformation.

This opportunity to "Do-Over" is found throughout Scripture. God begins and ends the Bible with the message that He is offering mankind a "second chance." You can start all over—2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

Many have realized this truth. They were ashamed, embarrassed, and burdened by the physical, emotional, and spiritual weight of sin, but they seized the opportunity to start over when it was offered (1 Timothy 1:1-16, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.")

Here is the opportunity to "get out" of the misery that your life has become! Here ☞ is the offer to "start over"! But in order to be blessed ☞ you have to choose to follow God's conditions of the offer. ☞ Do you WANT to change? Do you want to be unburdened from the past that is shameful and embarrassing?

2. ☞ Proverbs 10:7, "The memory of the righteous is blessed, but the name of the wicked will rot." You leave a legacy as either a "son of thunder" or "an apostle of love." Your physical aging results in emotional and mental memories.

☞ The absolute fact is that you will be remembered. ☞ The piercing query asks, how will you be remembered? All are born differently. Genetic proclivities tempt us to follow their emotional, mental, physical, and inter-personal tugs. Some are good but others are irritating or absolutely immoral. It is up to you to choose how you will control your genetic engineering. ☞ Will you follow the tempting choice to be known by the family traits and be a son of thunder or will you refuse the temptation and become an apostle of love? ☞ Will you be remembered as a "sheep thief" or a "saint"?
3. ☞ Galatians 4:19b, "until Christ is formed in you." Have you so transformed that Christ has formed with you? (Galatians 2:20).
4. ☞ Acts 4:13, "Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus." As you go to school, to

work, to recreational activities, does your behavior cause people to see your transformation?

The North American Indians have an interesting myth for the origin of their maize. They say that once a young Indian Princess was being pursued by her enemies. She took refuge among some reeds that grew on the river's edge. She carefully wrapped the reeds around her to hide herself. In doing so the river gods caused her slender form to be changed into a graceful stalk; her teeth into the milk-white kernels, and her lovely flowing hair into the silk. After the transformation there was in the midst of the river reeds a tall, bending stalk of Indian corn. So that ever after, in the rustling of the cornfields, the red man could hear the stirring of a company of timid girls.

☞ Let us understand that "transformation" is NOT optional. We MUST be transformed in our minds so our thoughts transform our actions. This urges repentance upon all. The only acceptable standard for our transformation is the Holy Word of God! Let us read, believe, integrate into our decision-making processes the Holy Word of God!