

John 13:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples,
whom Jesus loved.

Analysis

Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom (ἀνακείμενος ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ, anakeimenos en tō kolpō)—the posture of reclining at table, common in Greco-Roman dining. Guests reclined on left elbow, leaving right hand free for eating. The one "in the bosom" reclined with head near Jesus' chest—position of intimacy and honor. **One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved**—John's characteristic self-reference (also 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 20). He never names himself, identifying instead by Christ's love for him.

This beloved disciple is John himself (church tradition unanimous). His self-description emphasizes not his love for Jesus but Jesus' love for him—hallmark of true spirituality. John defines himself by Christ's affection, not personal achievement. The phrase echoes 1:18, where the Son is "in the bosom of the Father"—John enjoys with Jesus the intimacy Jesus enjoys with the Father. This proximity positions John to ask Jesus about the betrayer.

Historical Context

Ancient dining arrangements placed honored guests nearest the host. John's position indicates special relationship with Jesus. Written late in life (AD 85-95), elderly John reflects on his unique intimacy with Christ. He never boasts but marvels at being loved by the Lord. This humility characterizes his epistles—"we love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does defining yourself as "the one Jesus loves" rather than by achievements transform identity?
2. What does physical proximity to Jesus at the table symbolize about spiritual intimacy with Christ?

Interlinear Text

ἦν	δέ	ἀνακείμενος	εἷς	τῶν	μαθητῶν	αὐτοῦ	ἐν
there was	Now	leaning	one	G3588	disciples	of his	on
G2258	G1161	G345	G1520		G3101	G846	G1722
τῷ	κόλπῳ	τοῦ	Ἰησοῦς·	ὃν	ἠγάπα	ὁ	Ἰησοῦς·
G3588	bosom	G3588	Jesus	whom	loved	G3588	Jesus
	G2859		G2424	G3739	G25		G2424

Additional Cross-References

John 19:26 (Love): When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son!

John 21:20 (Love): Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee?

John 21:7 (Love): Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea.

John 20:2 (Love): Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him.

John 11:3 (Love): Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.

John 11:36 (Love): Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him!

John 11:5 (Love): Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.

2 Samuel 12:3 (Parallel theme): But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter.