

John 21

[John 21:1](#) After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested Himself in this way.

[John 21:2](#) Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together.

[John 21:3](#) Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will also come with you." They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing.

[John 21:4](#) But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.

[John 21:5](#) So Jesus said to them, "Children, you do not have any fish, do you?" They answered Him, "No."

[John 21:6](#) And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch." So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish.

[John 21:7](#) Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea.

[John 21:8](#) But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net full of fish.

- John calls the sea of Galilee the sea of Tiberias, which was its Roman name and probably the more familiar name to John's Gentile readers
 - One day Peter decides to go fishing, and since many of the apostles were fishermen, six more decided to join Peter
 - It appears this is more than merely recreation
 - They appear to have returned to practicing their old profession
 - It would seem they lack an appreciation for their new commission nor are they eager to get started
 - Knowing how much the apostles did to spread the early church, it's remarkable to think they were dragging their feet at first
 - It seems that without this visit by Christ, they might never had started to preach and care for the saints
 - Of course, we know that wasn't going to satisfy Christ

- So He appears to make sure they stick the plan
- And the plan is to continue the work that Jesus began
- This is a reminder that we are all ambassadors and witnesses to Christ, though some of us are called into greater degrees of service
 - We are just here on earth killing time for the Kingdom
 - We aren't supposed to set our sights on grand earthly achievement
 - Or excessive wealth
 - Or even security and tranquility
 - We all like those things, but pursuing them runs counter to pursuing our mission to serve Christ on earth
 - We live here to present the Lord to a lost and dying world perishing in their sin
 - We only have a limited time to serve Him
 - So everyday counts
 - Jesus pulled these men away from their nets three years ago for good reason
 - But now they seem to have settled for the old life
- Thank the Lord that the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable, so Jesus wasn't going to let them become satisfied in fishing the sea
 - So as the story goes, these spend the entire night on the water attempting to fish, but they catch nothing
 - Here again notice they are fishing in the dark, at night
 - As we've seen over and over again, John emphasizes darkness to picture sin, unbelief, the enemy and rebellion
 - They worked in darkness and got nowhere
 - But then Jesus appeared on the shore of the Sea, though they don't recognize Him
 - This is Jesus last recorded appearance before His ascension

- It happened sometime in the 32 days between his appearance to the eleven in Jerusalem and His ascension on the 40th day
- Jesus addresses them with a Greek word that means young boy
 - So He calls out to them, Lads you don't them little boys, as if to suggest they were just playing games, pretending to be like adults
 - And He points out that they don't have any fish
- Then Jesus gives them some helpful advice to lower their nets again on the "right" side of the boat and they will find fish
 - You may remember that a similar moment happened three years earlier recorded in Luke 5
 - As Jesus was calling these men the first time, He found a number of them fishing
 - And though they weren't having any luck on that particular day, Jesus instructed them to place their nets in the water once more
 - And when they did, they received a great harvest
 - Jesus was showing them His power and their inadequacy
 - At that time, He told them to drop their nets and follow Him instead, which they all did
 - That was a courageous if impulsive decision
 - It led them to see and experience miraculous things
 - And yet here again they sit on a boat with their nets
 - They still need to make a committed decision to follow
- So when Jesus tells them to lower their nets again, I wonder if they sensed any deja vu?
 - They do as Jesus directed, and immediately the net is filled to the point that they can't even pull it back into the boat
 - At seeing the full nets, John remembers the earlier time and puts 2 and 2 together
 - John says to Peter "It is the Lord!"

- Immediately, Peter puts his robe back on and dives into the water
 - Fishermen characteristically worked in their undergarments, which were shorter robes
 - Peter put his outer garment back on before leaving the boat
 - Normally, people strip down before jumping in the water rather than adding more clothing
 - John's description adds to a sense of chaotic thinking on Peter's part
- This is such a classic picture of these two men
 - John is usually the one with the quick insight but slow to act
 - While Peter is usually the one to act boldly but impulsively
 - Even John's choice of words suggests impulsiveness
 - John says Peter "threw himself into the sea"
 - If we could only combine the two personalities together
- The rest of the disciples see no reason to plunge into the sea and leave their boat and fish behind
 - So they patiently bring the craft into the shore to meet with Jesus and Peter
 - John's description seems to emphasize that Peter's impulsiveness left the rest of the disciples to labor without his help
 - They have about 100 yards distance to cover, which took a little time given the number of fish

John 21:9 So when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire already laid and fish placed on it, and bread.

John 21:10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have now caught."

John 21:11 Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn.

John 21:12 Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples ventured to question Him, "Who are You?" knowing that it was the Lord.

John 21:13 Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise.

[John 21:14](#) This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead.

- By the time the boat reaches the shore and they secure the nets with the fish, Jesus and Peter have started a small charcoal fire and are cooking
 - It's interesting that there is a fish on the fire
 - When Jesus first greeted them from the shore, He asked if they had caught any fish, and they said no
 - So there were no fish on the shore
 - Furthermore, when the boat with the fish finally reached the shore, Jesus had already placed a fish on the fire
 - And with the fish, there was bread
 - Where do we suppose that bread and fish came from?
 - Jesus served the meal of bread and fish to the disciples as they returned from the fishing trip
 - And as Jesus is serving His disciples, they bring the net up on shore and count the fish
 - They count 153 fish
 - The count of the fish is a matter of much speculation...what does 153 mean?
 - The number 153 is oddly specific and yet it doesn't relate to any specific biblical pattern or event
 - When a number isn't part of pattern, we should avoid creating one
 - So to make too much of the specific number is to miss the bigger point John is making
- First, the fact that the men took time to count the fish is evidence of the significance of this catch
 - Fishermen have always been this way...numbers matter to fishermen, and the bigger the number, the better
 - This fact has led many a fisherman to embellish the number and size of his catch
 - Given the size of nets in this day, 153 fish is an extraordinary catch

- Secondly, it represents the bounty of God's harvest when these men fish under His direction
 - The large number of fish spoke to the disciples about the potential benefit of working under the Lord's commission
 - If the Lord could assure this kind of catch in the sea, imagine what He can accomplish in building His Kingdom
- After all seven disciples are present, the Lord took the bread and breaks it and gives it out to His disciples along with the fish
 - None of them say, "Who are you" because they know it's Jesus
 - You might ask why did John feel the need to point this out?
 - Apparently, Jesus' resurrected appearance is so different that you can't recognize Him on the basis of His physical appearance alone
- Instead, they can only recognize Him based on familiar words and actions
 - When He says or does something they recognize, then they know Him by His voice
 - In this moment, they know Him because He breaks the bread and fish in a manner they recognize
- John says this the third appearance of Jesus, counting the two in Jerusalem
 - Three appearances suggests a divine appointment, since three is the number of the fullness of Godhead working together
 - And in this third appearance, Jesus turns to Peter to complete the restoration of Peter following His denial of Jesus at the trial

John 21:15 So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My lambs."

John 21:16 He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep."

John 21:17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep."

[John 21:18](#) “Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go.”

[John 21:19](#) Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, “Follow Me!”

- After the meal, Jesus asked Peter if Peter loved Jesus more than these?
 - The word for love Jesus uses is in Greek is agape, which does not mean emotional or brotherly love
 - Rather it is the word for self-sacrificial devotion to another
 - Agape love means placing another’s interests and needs above your own
 - Agape is often accompanied by other forms of love like brotherly love or familial love
 - But it is different than those
 - And when Jesus says “than these,” who is He referencing?
 - Some have concluded Jesus was referring to the other six disciples
 - As in “Do you love me more than you love your brothers?”
 - Or perhaps “Do you love for me more than they love me?”
 - I think those interpretations are unnatural and ignore the context and the subsequent words of Christ
 - In my view, “these” refers to the fish in the net, which are the focus of context in this chapter
 - Christ is asking Peter “Are you more devoted to me than you are to catching fish?”
 - Was Peter prepared to set aside his fishing business to serve the Lord?
- Peter answers quickly, even indignantly saying yes
 - To which Jesus replies, tend my lambs
 - The term “tend” in Greek is literally the word for feed

- So Jesus is asking Peter to feed lambs or baby sheep
- In fact, Jesus asks a similar question twice more
- But each time He asks, the words are slightly different in the Greek
 - Jesus uses the Greek word lambs but then moves to sheep
 - He starts with feed then to shepherd and back to feed
 - By varying these words, Jesus never uses the same combination twice across the three statements
- Obviously, in all cases, Jesus is stating a metaphor for pastoring the Church
 - Lambs and sheep stand for believers, perhaps in varying degrees of maturity
 - And feeding is always a metaphor for teaching the word of God
 - While shepherding describes the overall care of God's people
- Jesus is essentially asking the same question three times, but He varies the language to avoid pure repetition while making His point
 - Peter was asked the same question in three different ways on the night Jesus was arrested
 - He gave the same answer each time, though with increasing insistence
 - Now Jesus gives Peter the chance to reverse that mistake in three like steps
 - And with each response, Peter is drawn deeper into his role as pastor of the early church
 - With Peter restored, Jesus pronounces Peter's future death, on a cross, and commands Peter to follow Him
 - Jesus prediction contrasts Peter's youthful independence and impulsiveness to the sobering constraints that come with serving God
 - Peter was eventually crucified as testified to by Tertullian and Origen, two early church fathers
 - Origen says Peter was crucified head down by his own request

- Peter lived with this prediction hanging over his head for over 30 years
 - And in 1Peter, the apostle wrote that those who suffer death for following Christ bring glory to Him in their death
 - Peter carried a significant burden and did so faithfully
 - For all his youthful brashness, he learned patience in the end

John 21:20 Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; the one who also had leaned back on His bosom at the supper and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?"

John 21:21 So Peter seeing him said to Jesus, "Lord, and what about this man?"

John 21:22 Jesus said to him, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!"

John 21:23 Therefore this saying went out among the brethren that that disciple would not die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but only, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?"

- Once more, John focuses on Peter in his unique way, recording this quaint moment when Peter questions Jesus over John's future
 - The whole exchange sounds a little like brothers fighting over bedtime
 - Peter just learned that the price of serving Jesus was that Peter would face a death like that of his Master
 - And as usual, we find John nearby
 - As John describes himself, he was the one Jesus loved, which is a self-deprecating description
 - But it was probably also an indication of John's prominence within the group
 - So Peter sees John and wonders if John will likewise suffer as a result of being a prominent apostle
 - I like to imagine that after Peter heard his fate, John gave Peter a knowing look, as if to say I'm glad I'm not you
 - So Peter gestures to John and asks Jesus what will John have to suffer?
 - Jesus tells Peter that John's future is none of Peter's business, and in fact what if Jesus never wanted John to die?

- John tells us that this was not spoken literally, but simply to make a point to Peter
- Though because John lived so much longer than the rest of the disciples, rumors had developed in the early church that John would live forever
- Predictably, those rumors stopped soon after John's death
- With that, John ends this epilogue to his Gospel

[John 21:24](#) This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true.

[John 21:25](#) And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written.

- As I mentioned earlier, the scene in John's final chapter weaves together many of the ideas and themes found in earlier chapters
 - How many can you find? Here's a partial list
 - vs.1-4 – Darkness giving way to light (see Chap 1)
 - v.2 – Collecting the first disciples (see Chap 1)
 - v.2 – The town of Cana (Chap 2)
 - v.3 – The apostles alone on a boat near the shore at night without Jesus (Chap 6)
 - vs.4, 12 – The sheep know their Shepherd by His voice (Chap 6)
 - v.9 – Peter at a charcoal fire with Jesus nearby (Chap 18)
 - v.9 – Jesus feeding the disciples with bread and fish miraculously (Chap 6)
 - v.13 – Jesus taking the bread and breaking it for the disciples (Chap 13)
 - v.14 – Jesus' resurrection (Chap 20)
 - v.15 – Jesus eating fish (Chap 20)
 - v.15 – Jesus' calling His followers His sheep (Chap 6)

- vs.15-17 – Peter’s three statements of allegiance (vs. his denials in Chap 18)
- v.16 – Peter’s original name, Simon (Chap 1)
- v.18 – A veiled reference to a coming crucifixion (Chap 12)
- v.19 – Jesus calling Peter to follow him (Chap 1)
- v.20 – John described as the one leaning on Jesus’ bosom (Chap 13)
- v.22 – The potential some believers some won’t see death (Chap 14)
- v.22 – The return of Jesus for the Church (Chap 14)
- v.24 – The testimony of John is true (Chap 20)