




Sunday School Lesson
John 21:1-25
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We Serve A Risen Savior



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This is the second lesson on the resurrection appearances of Jesus and is also taken from the Gospel of John.

I. Context

Because the basic background material for this study remains the same as for last week's study from chapter 20, the relevant material in that lesson will be copied into this lesson for convenient reference.

a. Historical

Regarding the composition of the fourth gospel, a wide range of viewpoints will be uncovered in modern New Testament scholarship. Regarding the origin of the document, Massey H. Shepherd in the Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible has a helpful summation:

The acceptance of the gospel in the NT canon in the late 2nd - early 3rd cent. was a seal of acceptance of its authorship by John son of Zebedee, one of the 12 apostles of Jesus. Though contested at that time, this official view held the day without serious challenge until recent times; and it is still stoutly defended by many able scholars, Catholic and Protestant. Its strongest support is the testimony of Irenaeus, who claimed to have received the tradition firsthand, when a youth, from Polycarp.

Although modern NT scholarship is not as confident in the traditional view of authorship, the document's origin is generally viewed to have taken place sometime in the middle 80s to the middle 90s of the first Christian century. Assuming the correctness of the Johannine connection to this document, the ministry of the Apostle John seems to have been focused in the region of Ephesus in the Roman province of Asia during the second half of the beginning Christian century. In this view, the gospel would have been written in that region and most likely addressed to Christians living in the same general area. Alternative views move in the direction of not having an idea about who wrote the gospel and will tend to project a somewhat later date but still originating in the same region.

In either case the gospel comes out of a Johannine oriented community of believers and seeks to provide insight about Jesus to members of that community as well as those perhaps attracted to this new religion that would come to be called Christianity. For a helpful summary of the religious views found in the gospel, see Gary M. Burge, "John, the Theology of," in the [Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology](#).

b. Literary

Regarding the literary setting of 21:1-23, Gary M. Burge in the [Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology](#) has a helpful summary of the literary structure of the fourth gospel:

The Fourth Gospel is organized into two principle sections and these are framed by a prologue (1:1-18) and an epilogue (21:1-25), each of which were likely added at some later date either by the Gospel's author or one of his followers. The prologue introduces the incarnation of the preexistent Word and poetically sets the stage for all that

is to follow: God discloses his Son in the world of darkness; he is popularly rejected; a select group of followers discover life; and even though the darkness tries, it cannot defeat this Son.

The first section is commonly called the Book of Signs (1:19-12:50) in order to describe how Jesus appears within Judaism replacing its institutions (the temple, sacred wells, teachers) and festivals (Passover, Tabernacles). He offers overwhelming messianic gifts that exploit images intrinsic in the Jewish setting in the narrative (wine, wisdom, water, healing, bread, light, life). The final event is the raising of Lazarus—which utterly discloses Jesus' identity—as well as seals his fate. But even though Jesus experiences hostility among the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, still he discovers receptivity in Galilee (2:11; 4:45; 7:1; etc.) and at the end of this section, Greeks from Galilee eagerly line up to follow him (12:20-26).

The second section is called the Book of Glory (13:1-20:31) because now Jesus takes aside his followers, washes their feet at his final Passover meal (13:1-20), and exhaustively explains to them who he is and what will happen (13:31-17:26). But hinted throughout the Gospel is the notion that the impending cross of Christ will be no tragedy, but a time when his glory will become visible to all (3:13-15; 13:31; 17:1-5). The cross is one more sign given to disclose that Jesus has been sent by the Father and is now returning to him. For John, this cross is voluntary (10:11, 17, 18). Christ is departing, having completed the work he set out to do. But before he goes, he distributes gifts to all among his followers (20:19-29), blessing them one more time.

Most scholars think that the earliest ending of the gospel is in 20:30-31 and that chapter 21 is a later addition no doubt from the same Johannine sources that supplied the original Gospel. If it is secondary, it nevertheless has the ring of historicity and the echo of Johannine language. Jesus makes a resurrection appearance and commissions his followers in anticipation of his permanent absence.

This is perhaps the most commonly held view regarding the thought structure of the gospel of John. And it has more to commend it than most of the alternative viewpoints.

My own understanding derived from almost forty years of study of this document is that the role of the [Prologue](#) is quite substantial in setting a conceptual foundation for the rest of the document. The basic viewpoint of Jesus as the divine Word (Logos) set forth in 1:1-18 becomes the conceptual filter through which the story of Jesus is told in the remainder of the gospel. For more details see [my treatment](#) at Cranfordville.com under [NT Study Aids](#). This is a major reason for the narrative view of John being so dramatically different than that of the Synoptic Gospels, as each gospel writer tells his own story of Jesus.

The particular context of 21:1-23 can be seen more clearly from looking at the [Life of Christ](#) outline at Cranfordville.com:

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
VI. Resurrection appearances and ascension				
	28:1-20 (2%)	16:1-20 (3%)	24:1-53 (5%)	20:1-21:25 (6%)
A. The Empty Tomb	28:1-8	16:1-8	24:1-12	20:1-10
B. The Appearances to His Disciples	28:9-20	16:9-20	24:13-53	20:11-21:25
1. The Bribing of the Soldiers	28:11-15			
2. To the Eleven in Galilee	28:16-20			
3. To the Two Disciples on the Road to Emmaus	—	(16:12-13)	24:13-35	—
4. To the Disciples in Jerusalem	—	(16:14-18)	24:36-49	—
5. The Ascension of Jesus	—	(16:19-20)	24:50-53	—
6. To Mary Magdalene	—	(16:9-11)	—	20:11-18
7. To the Disciples in Jerusalem	—	—	—	20:19-23
8. To the Disciples with Thomas present	—	—	—	20:24-29
9. To the Seven Disciples at the Sea of Tiberias	—	—	—	21:1-23

Our passage, 21:1-23, contains the last of the four resurrection appearances of Jesus to the disciples and to Mary that are found in the fourth gospel. These are unique to this gospel and are not described by any of the other gospel writers. Establishing a clearly defined sequence of the resurrection appearances of Jesus between the three gospels that originally contained accounts is very difficult. The thematic concerns of each gospel writer was more important than reconstructing a chronology of the appearances. We must, therefore, content ourselves to looking at the various accounts in each gospel and gain the insight provided by each. Since there is no overlapping between the accounts, the chronological issues become less important than they would otherwise be. We can determine, however, that these eight appearances took place over a forty day period between the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus. Luke provides this insight in [Acts 1:3](#) (NRSV): “After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.”

A word needs to be said about the literary nature of chapter twenty-three in John. Most New Testament scholars who study the Johannine section of the New Testament carefully will conclude that this final chapter has been added to the rest of the document as a postscript. Whether or not it was a part of the original compositional process and was simply added after the passing of some time and before the document was circulated to various ancient Christian communities is not clear. The alternative possibility is that this was added sometime afterwards by members of the Johannine community as a testimony to John. More scholars are persuaded this way, than with the first possibility. But the broad consensus is that this material is a later addition, which ever of the above situations most adequately explains how this was done. A major basis for seeing this as an addition is the change of narrative viewpoint, along with substantial shift in vocabulary and writing style that talks about the same topics as in the rest of the document but expresses those ideas with different words and phraseology. Unfortunately, the process of English translation tends to wash out these distinctives so that they are more difficult to spot from a translation.

But the last two verses of the chapter provide the clearest signal of what is going on (vv. 24-25, NRSV): “24 This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true. 25 But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” These verses suggest that this material is an addition by their attempt to identify the Beloved Disciple and by the indication that he is the one who has written the previous material (that is, chapters 1-20).

II. Message

The most natural division of these verses is twofold: (1) the appearance of Jesus to the disciples in Galilee (vv. 1-14), and (2) the special instruction given to Peter with mention of the Beloved Disciple’s fate (vv. 15-23).

a. By the Seashore, vv. 1-14

The Greek New Testament

<21:1> Μετὰ ταῦτα ἐφάνερωσεν ἑαυτὸν πάλιν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τοῖς μαθηταῖς ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης τῆς Τιβεριάδος· ἐφάνερωσεν δὲ οὕτως. <21:2> ἦσαν ὁμοῦ Σίμων Πέτρος καὶ Θωμᾶς ὁ λεγόμενος Δίδυμος καὶ Ναθαναὴλ ὁ ἀπὸ Κανὰ τῆς Γαλιλαίας καὶ οἱ τοῦ Ζεβεδαίου καὶ ἄλλοι ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ δύο. <21:3> λέγει αὐτοῖς Σίμων Πέτρος, Ὑπάγω ἀλιεύειν. λέγουσιν αὐτῷ, Ἐρχόμεθα καὶ ἡμεῖς σὺν σοί. ἐξῆλθον καὶ ἐνέβησαν εἰς τὸ πλοῖον, καὶ ἐν

NRSV

1 After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. 2 Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. 3 Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. 4 Just after day-

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1 Later Jesus appeared again to the disciples beside the Sea of Galilee. This is how it happened. 2 Several of the disciples were there – Simon Peter, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples. 3 Simon Peter said, "I'm going fishing." "We'll come, too," they all said. So they went out in the boat, but they caught nothing all night. 4 At dawn the disciples saw Jesus standing on the beach, but they

ἐκεῖνη τῇ νυκτὶ ἐπίασαν οὐδέν. <21:4> πρῶτας δὲ ἤδη γενομένης ἔσθη Ἰησοῦς εἰς τὸν αἰγιαλόν, οὐ μέντοι ἤδεισαν οἱ μαθηταὶ ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστιν. <21:5> λέγει οὖν αὐτοῖς [ὁ] Ἰησοῦς, Παιδία, μὴ τι προσφάγιον ἔχετε; ἀπεκρίθησαν αὐτῷ, Οὐ. <21:6> ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Βάλετε εἰς τὰ δεξιὰ μέρη τοῦ πλοίου τὸ δίκτυον, καὶ εὐρήσετε. ἔβαλον οὖν, καὶ οὐκέτι αὐτὸ ἐλκύσαι ἴσχυον ἀπὸ τοῦ πλήθους τῶν ἰχθύων. <21:7> λέγει οὖν ὁ μαθητῆς ἐκεῖνος ὃν ἠγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς τῷ Πέτρῳ, Ὁ κύριός ἐστιν. Σίμων οὖν Πέτρος ἀκούσας ὅτι ὁ κύριός ἐστιν τὸν ἐπενδύτην διεζώσατο, ἦν γὰρ γυμνός, καὶ ἔβαλεν ἑαυτὸν εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν, <21:8> οἱ δὲ ἄλλοι μαθηταὶ τῷ πλοιαρίῳ ἦλθον, οὐ γὰρ ἦσαν μακρὰν ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς ἀλλὰ ὡς ἀπὸ πηχῶν διακοσίων, σύροντες τὸ δίκτυον τῶν ἰχθύων. <21:9> ὡς οὖν ἀπέβησαν εἰς τὴν γῆν βλέπουσιν ἀνθρακιὰν κειμένην καὶ ὀψάριον ἐπικείμενον καὶ ἄρτον. <21:10> λέγει αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Ἐνέγκατε ἀπὸ τῶν ὀψαρίων ὧν ἐπίασατε νῦν. <21:11> ἀνέβη οὖν Σίμων Πέτρος καὶ εἴλκυσε τὸ δίκτυον εἰς τὴν γῆν μεστὸν ἰχθύων μεγάλων ἑκατὸν πενήκοντα τριῶν· καὶ τοσοῦτων ὄντων οὐκ ἐσχίσθη τὸ δίκτυον. <21:12> λέγει αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Δεῦτε ἀριστήσατε. οὐδεὶς δὲ ἐτόλμα τῶν μαθητῶν ἐξετάσαι αὐτόν, Σὺ τίς εἶ; εἰδότες ὅτι ὁ κύριός ἐστιν. <21:13> ἔρχεται Ἰησοῦς καὶ λαμβάνει τὸν ἄρτον καὶ δίδωσιν αὐτοῖς, καὶ τὸ ὀψάριον ὁμοίως. <21:14> τοῦτο ἤδη τρίτον ἐφανερῶθη Ἰησοῦς τοῖς μαθηταῖς ἐγερθεὶς ἐκ νεκρῶν.

break, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5 Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." 6 He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. 7 That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. 8 But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off. 9 When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. 10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." 11 So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. 14 This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

couldn't see who he was. 5 He called out, "Friends, have you caught any fish?" "No," they replied. 6 Then he said, "Throw out your net on the right-hand side of the boat, and you'll get plenty of fish!" So they did, and they couldn't draw in the net because there were so many fish in it. 7 Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his tunic (for he had stripped for work), jumped into the water, and swam ashore. 8 The others stayed with the boat and pulled the loaded net to the shore, for they were only out about three hundred feet. 9 When they got there, they saw that a charcoal fire was burning and fish were frying over it, and there was bread. 10 "Bring some of the fish you've just caught," Jesus said. 11 So Simon Peter went aboard and dragged the net to the shore. There were 153 large fish, and yet the net hadn't torn. 12 "Now come and have some breakfast!" Jesus said. And no one dared ask him if he really was the Lord because they were sure of it. 13 Then Jesus served them the bread and the fish. 14 This was the third time Jesus had appeared to his disciples since he had been raised from the dead.

Comments:

Massey H. Shepherd in the John section of the *Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible* has a helpful summation of these verses.

This episode, with its setting at the Sea of Tiberias (cf. 6:1), has similarities to the story in Luke 5:2-11—esp. in the initiative of Peter, followed by his call to discipleship; the mention of the sons of Zebedee, only here in this gospel; and the heavy weight of fish. The story may well be a completion of the unfinished and unfulfilled promise of Mark 14:28; 16:7 of an appearance to the disciples in Galilee. But the author has given the tradition a Eucharistic

allusion, comparable to that in the feeding of the multitude (ch. 6)—i.e. the risen Lord is made known in the breaking of bread (cf. Luke 24:35; Acts 10:41). Note that Jesus has already prepared the breakfast of bread and fish before ever the fish are brought in by the disciples. Note too that it is the beloved disciple who is first to recognize the Lord, as it was he who was first to believe in the Resurrection (20:8). The number of fish, a hundred and fifty-three (vs. 11), has inspired many attempts at symbolic interpretation—e.g. Jerome declared it the total of species of fish, and Augustine discovered it is the sum of the numbers 1 to 17, which in turn is the sum of the symbolic numbers 10 and 7.

This appearance of Jesus to the disciples took place in northern Palestine at the Sea of Galilee, which is here called the Sea of Tiberias. The mention of “again” (v. 1) indicates that the writer intends this to be a subsequent appearance of Jesus. The first two were in Jerusalem, but this one is in Galilee. With unusual language not used elsewhere in the gospel, the writer stresses that Jesus revealed himself to the disciples (2x in verse 1; 1x in v. 14).



The scene begins (vv. 1-3) with Peter along with six other disciples together along the sea shore. Peter decided to go fishing and the others went with him. Those mentioned include Thomas, Nathanael, the two sons of Zebedee (James and John) and two other unnamed disciples. But they were unsuccessful in their efforts, even though they had worked through the night.

This activity has sometimes been viewed as a negative action by these disciples, but the text provides no suggestion that they were doing something wrong or inappropriate by going fishing. This was no act of disobedience by them to their Lord.

Early the next morning (v. 4), Jesus stood on the shore and instructed them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat, which they did. Their success was astounding. With this surprising catch of fish things began clicking in the disciples’ minds. The unnamed beloved disciple (most likely John) recognized Jesus and told Peter, “It is the Lord.”

With that Peter threw on some clothes and jumped in the sea to get to shore ahead of the boat. He was more interested in seeing the Lord than in the fish that had been caught. In the meantime, the others managed to get the boat ashore so they could also see Jesus.

Once everyone was there (vv. 9-13), they discovered a fire already going with some fish on it. But some more fish was needed, so Peter hauled in the net from the boat to provide some more fish for breakfast. The language of the text, especially verse thirteen (“**Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish**”), is similar to that at the Last Supper, which is found in the synoptic Gospels rather than in John. But it also reminds of the feeding of the 5,000 in chapter six (NRSV, v. 11): “Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted.”

The mentioning of the precise number of 153 fish being caught has occasioned countless speculation regarding the possible symbolic significance of this number. For an interesting summation of a wide variety of proposals see George Beasley-Murray, *John*, vol. 36 in the *Word Biblical Commentary* series, pp. 401-404. When all is said and done, we don’t know for certain exactly what the number specifies. The speculation began with Jerome who citing an ancient source saw it as representing all the species of fish known in the ancient world. The speculation goes down hill from there. The obvious meaning is that a very large number were caught through the supernatural intervention of Jesus.

What can be learned from these verses? One thing is clear. The disciples were going about their daily routine when Jesus revealed himself to them. He reflected interest in their nonreligious activities as well as for their hunger by providing them breakfast.

Sometimes spiritually charged experiences of worship and encounter with God leave one thinking that this should be a continuous experience. When life settles back down into a regular routine, the conclusion may be drawn that something is wrong with one’s spiritual life. Of course, the older we become the more strength we find in regular routine. As young people such is boring and dull.

Yet in the midst of everyday activities, Jesus can show up and transform that experience into a wonderful encounter with God. We must never forget that.

b. Peter's Test, vv. 15-25

The Greek New Testament

<21:15> Ὅτε οὖν ἠρίστησαν λέγει τῷ Σίμωνι Πέτρῳ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, *Σίμων Ἰωάννου, ἀγαπᾷς με πλέον τούτων;* λέγει αὐτῷ, Ναί, κύριε, σὺ οἶδας ὅτι φιλῶ σε. λέγει αὐτῷ, Βόσκε τὰ ἀρνία μου. <21:16> λέγει αὐτῷ πάλιν δεύτερον, *Σίμων Ἰωάννου, ἀγαπᾷς με;* λέγει αὐτῷ, Ναί, κύριε, σὺ οἶδας ὅτι φιλῶ σε. λέγει αὐτῷ, Ποίμαινε τὰ πρόβατά μου. <21:17> λέγει αὐτῷ τὸ τρίτον, *Σίμων Ἰωάννου, φιλεῖς με;* ἐλυπήθη ὁ Πέτρος ὅτι εἶπεν αὐτῷ τὸ τρίτον, Φιλεῖς με; καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ, Κύριε, πάντα σὺ οἶδας, σὺ γινώσκεις ὅτι φιλῶ σε. λέγει αὐτῷ [ὁ Ἰησοῦς], Βόσκε τὰ πρόβατά μου. <21:18> ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω σοι, ὅτε ἦς νεώτερος, ἐζώννυες σεαυτὸν καὶ περιεπάτεις ὅπου ἤθελες· ὅταν δὲ γηράσης, ἐκτενεῖς τὰς χεῖράς σου, καὶ ἄλλος σε ζώσει καὶ οἴσει ὅπου οὐ θέλεις. <21:19> τοῦτο δὲ εἶπεν σημαίνων ποίῳ θανάτῳ δοξάσει τὸν θεόν. καὶ τοῦτο εἰπὼν λέγει αὐτῷ, Ἀκολουθεῖ μοι.

<21:20> Ἐπιστραφεὶς ὁ Πέτρος βλέπει τὸν μαθητὴν ὃν ἠγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀκολουθοῦντα, ὃς καὶ ἀνέπεσεν ἐν τῷ δεῖπνῳ ἐπὶ τὸ στήθος αὐτοῦ καὶ εἶπεν, Κύριε, τίς ἐστὶν ὁ παραδιδούς σε; <21:21> τοῦτον οὖν ἰδὼν ὁ Πέτρος λέγει τῷ Ἰησοῦ, Κύριε, οὗτος δὲ τίς; <21:22> λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Ἐὰν αὐτὸν θέλω μένειν ἕως ἔρχομαι, τί πρὸς σέ; σὺ μοι ἀκολουθεῖ. <21:23> ἐξῆλθεν οὖν οὗτος ὁ λόγος εἰς τοὺς ἀδελφούς ὅτι ὁ μαθητὴς ἐκεῖνος οὐκ ἀποθνήσκει· οὐκ εἶπεν δὲ αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὅτι οὐκ ἀποθνήσκει ἀλλ', Ἐὰν αὐτὸν θέλω μένειν ἕως ἔρχομαι, τί πρὸς σέ];

<21:24> Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ μαθητὴς ὁ μαρτυρῶν περὶ τούτων καὶ ὁ γράψας ταῦτα, καὶ οἶδαμεν ὅτι

NRSV

15 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." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." 16 A second time he said to him, "*Simon son of John, do you love me?*" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." 17 He said to him the third time, "*Simon son of John, do you love me?*" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. 18 Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." 19 (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

20 Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; he was the one who had reclined next to Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?" 21 When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about him?" 22 Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!" 23 So the rumor spread in the community that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, "If it is my

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15 After breakfast Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," Peter replied, "you know I love you." "Then feed my lambs," Jesus told him. 16 Jesus repeated the question: "Simon son of John, do you love me?" "Yes, Lord," Peter said, "you know I love you." "Then take care of my sheep," Jesus said. 17 Once more he asked him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved that Jesus asked the question a third time. He said, "Lord, you know everything. You know I love you." Jesus said, "Then feed my sheep. 18 The truth is, when you were young, you were able to do as you liked and go wherever you wanted to. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will direct you and take you where you don't want to go." 19 Jesus said this to let him know what kind of death he would die to glorify God. Then Jesus told him, "Follow me."

20 Peter turned around and saw the disciple Jesus loved following them – the one who had leaned over to Jesus during supper and asked, "Lord, who among us will betray you?" 21 Peter asked Jesus, "What about him, Lord?" 22 Jesus replied, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You follow me." 23 So the rumor spread among the community of believers that that disciple wouldn't die. But that isn't what Jesus said at all. He only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?" 24 This is that disciple who saw these events and

ἀληθῆς αὐτοῦ ἡ μαρτυρία ἐστίν.

<21:25> Ἔστιν δὲ καὶ ἄλλα πολλὰ ἃ ἐποίησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς, ἅτινα ἐὰν γράφηται καθ' ἓν, οὐδ' αὐτὸν οἶμαι τὸν κόσμον χωρῆσαι τὰ γραφόμενα βιβλία.

will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?" 24 This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true.

25 But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

recorded them here. And we all know that his account of these things is accurate.

25 And I suppose that if all the other things Jesus did were written down, the whole world could not contain the books.

Comments:

This second segment of the passage is actually three distinct passages: (1) Peter's test, vv. 15-19; (2) prediction of John's death (vv. 20-24); (3) postscript (v. 25).

After the meal, in the flow of the narrative, Jesus put Peter to the test with his haunting question, "Do you love me?" Although much is sometimes made of the shift of verbs in the three questions (*ἀγαπᾷς* to *φιλεῖς*), the more significant aspect is the threefold repetition of the question, which pressed Peter to deep reflection and soul-searching. Previously Peter had pledged undying loyalty to Jesus, only to deny him at his trial. Peter really did love the Lord and his consistent actions with a few wavers here and there proved his devotion. The forty days between resurrection and ascension were perhaps a greater test for Peter than for the other disciples.

Peter not only passed the test but received his marching orders as well: to take care of God's people, as a shepherd takes care of his flock. Peter will later echo this same language with a similar admonition to pastors in [1 Pet. 5:1-3](#) (NRSV):

"1 Now as an elder myself and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you 2 to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it — not for sordid gain but eagerly. 3 Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock. 4 And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away."

Peter would have to learn to do this, since as a fisherman the ways of a shepherd were not a part of his training and orientation. But he would learn and serve well.

Verses 18-19 contains a prophecy of Peter's eventual death, most likely by crucifixion. The language of these verses, especially verse eighteen, seem to point this direction. Strong early church tradition asserts that Peter was crucified by Nero in the mid-60s of the first century.

Verses 20-23 contain the narrative of Peter then raising the issue of how John was going to die. Jesus simply indicated that he would live a long time, which, according to early church tradition, he did by finishing his ministry right at the end of the first Christian century. Peter was curious about the destiny of his close friend John, but Jesus' words focused attention on each being faithful to the very end of their life.

What can we learn? Faithfulness to the Lord to the very end of our life is the main lesson. For some that may not include lots of time. For Peter, he had about 35 years ahead before martyrdom, when these words were spoken to him. For others, it may include a lot more time. John had almost seventy years ahead of him at this point in time before dying a natural death. How much time we have to serve is not nearly as important with how we use the time we have. This is our challenge, especially as we live a rapid pace, hectic style of living.

The lives and ministries of both these apostles demonstrate the process of learning how to serve and growing in their faith. Both would make substantial contribution to the life of Christianity by the close of their lives. That's our challenge today.