

# That You May Continue to Believe...



## AN Exposition of the gospel of John

### The Epilogue John 21:1-25

I think if I had been writing the Gospel of John, I would have ended it with the extraordinary close of chapter 20. If you think about it, it contains all the elements to make for a perfect ending. There is high drama in the story of the empty tomb and there is high drama in the story of Mary Magdalene. There is the high drama of Jesus meeting with the disciples and beauty of His gathering them around and breathing on them the blessed Holy Spirit. Then there is, of course, the high drama of Thomas missing Jesus' first appearance and then subsequently making his ridiculously brash statement. **"Unless I put my finger is the place where the nails were and my hand into the wound of His side, I will never believe."**

Then, finally, there is the extraordinary tension of Jesus appearing to the group on the very next Sunday night with Thomas there and calling Thomas on the carpet and even repeating back to him his own transparently stupid words. There is that brief lingering moment of suspense where you wonder as a reader what Thomas will do and you can feel the tension so thick its hard to breathe and then there is the grandeur of the moment when Thomas confesses openly and

full of faith and wonder what everyone already knows to be true about Jesus,  
**“My Lord and my God.”**

And then there is that extraordinary sentence at the end of the chapter when John says:

<sup>NIV</sup> **John 20:30**...Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. <sup>31</sup> But these are written that you may believe, may *continue to believe*, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

I mean that seems like such a good place to end the book. I mean you could end it with the Resurrection and the completely fearless love of Mary Magdalene and the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit and finally Thomas' extraordinarily insightful statement of faith, **“My Lord and My God.”** Really, what could be better than that? All those first century Jews that had been straddling the fence between Jesus and the synagogue would have felt the full force of the weight of John's literary and theological argument and would have been shamed in their failure to resist the pressure to forsake Jesus. It just would have been absolutely perfect, as perfect as when Paul Harvey concludes one of those rest of the story monologues and with just impeccable timing says, **“Good Day.”**

As a matter of fact, some modern scholars feeling that same sort of thing from chapter 20 go so far as to ask:

Was chapter 21 a part of this *gospel originally* or was it *tacked on* afterward, either by the Evangelist himself or by a later hand?<sup>1</sup>

Even some conservative scholars say chapter 21 was added later, but by John, to correct the view that he was not going to die before the return of Jesus<sup>2</sup>. But more liberal scholars say it was added later and that John was most certainly not the author.<sup>3</sup> One of favorite comments is by C.H. Dodd who argues that the chapter was added later as a concession to Rome with the purpose of defending the exaltation of Peter.<sup>4</sup> Now, I don't know how Dodd would know that; I don't even know why he would suspect that. Interestingly enough, Dodd, who otherwise has written a fairly useful commentary, doesn't think it necessary to even write any comments on chapter 21.

Of course, the whole discussion about whether John 21 ought to be included in the Gospel of John is really a difficult point to argue, especially since there are no ancient manuscripts that don't contain it.<sup>5</sup> Beyond that chapter 21, answers a question that any careful reader would desperately want to have resolved, **"What about Peter?"**

Now here is what I want to argue today as we wrap up John's gospel. I want to argue that these last four characters, John, Mary Magdalene, Thomas and Peter, are set in opposition to each other as literary foils to complete John's purpose in the book. Now let me see if I can explain what I mean. I think Mary Magdalene and Thomas are contrasted. Mary is an example of a person who loved Jesus and remained faithful to Him even in the throes of opposition and grief. Jesus appeared to her first. Thomas, on the other hand, is an example of someone who followed Jesus but who was unable rationally to come to grips with the testimony of others concerning Jesus' resurrection. Jesus appeared to Him last. Now, don't misunderstand me, I am not saying Thomas was evil or sinful or anything like that. What I am saying is that Mary's affection and faith was of a

superior nature; it was transcendent. Now to prove the point let me ask the question this way, **“Who would you rather have been? Would you rather had been Mary comforted by Jesus while grieving at His tomb or Thomas confronted by Jesus in his unbelief?”** You see the question is really pretty simple to answer.

Now, Peter and John are contrasted in almost exactly the same way. John is there at the cross to receive Jesus charge to care for His mother. Peter is not there. John was resolute in his confession of Jesus. Peter was not. Yet, here is the wonder of all wonders. Peter is not cast aside. He is held accountable for his words in almost the exact manner that Thomas is held accountable for his words but he is not cast aside. He is restored just like Thomas is restored and here is the most remarkable thing of all, he is given responsibility over Jesus flock. Now to make my point who you rather have been, John faithful at the foot of the cross or Peter shamed and questioned three times concerning his affection for Jesus. You see, I hope, what I mean.

You see John is finishing of his gospel with one final admonition to those who were straddling the fence between Jesus and the synagogue and he builds that admonition using four different people as illustrations. Now in the end, they are all made useful as servants of the risen Lord. But the applications to those first century readers and to us are profound. **First, Jesus always hears and sees what we do.** Because of that it is better to love Him and cleave to Him than it is to doubt. It is better to identify with Him even in the danger at the foot of the cross than it is to seek safety in denying His call and claim upon us. You see He sees and knows what we say; He sees and knows what we do. There is not such think as hidden doubt; there is no such thing as hidden unfaithfulness.

**Secondly, John makes it pretty clear that Jesus always reclaims His own.** You see, we are His sheep, His people, His servants and He will call us back to faithfulness even if it shames us, even if our own disobedience grieves us. We may be unfaithful but He cannot be unfaithful and He will draw us back, all the way back and the shame attached to that for a genuine child of God is a hard thing to reconcile with all that Jesus has accomplished on our behalf. So here's the point, **"It's better to just go ahead and cleave to Him in faith. It's better to continue believing in Him. It's better to keep on obeying His commands. It's better than the long road back."**

Now, that's what I want to argue this morning. So let's look at John 21 and see if the text will bear any of that out.

<sup>NIV</sup> **John 21:1**...Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way: <sup>2</sup> Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. <sup>3</sup> **"I'm going out to fish,"** Simon Peter told them, and they said, **"We'll go with you."** So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Now there are a couple of things that really pop out in these first few verses. First, the scene takes place near the Sea of Tiberias which is, of course, the same thing as the Sea of Galilee. That means that they had left Jerusalem and had gone back home most likely to Capernaum or possibly Bethsaida.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, there are only seven disciples mentioned here instead of the eleven that you would expect. The first three that are mentioned have all played prominent roles in John's Gospel. It was Nathaniel who in chapter one had said to Jesus:

<sup>NIV</sup> **John 1:49**..."**Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.**"

Of course, it was Thomas last week that said:

<sup>NIV</sup> **John 20:28**...**"My Lord and my God!"**

The sons of Zebedee are identified in both Mark and Luke as James and John.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Mark 10:35**...Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Luke 5:10**...and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

Finally, there were two other disciples who were not named but who were almost certainly Philip and Andrew. The reason I believe that is because John 1:44 tells us they were from the same town as Peter. Andrew was, of course, Peter's brother.

<sup>NIV</sup> **John 1:44**...Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida.

Of course, the reason that John doesn't give their name is because he wants to remain anonymous. But a little later on, the disciple whom Jesus loved (who is clearly one of the seven) is going to recognize that it is Jesus on the beach and is going to say so. You can see how the passage has helped Bible students nail down the identity of the "beloved disciple".<sup>7</sup>

Anyway, Peter says in verse 3, **"I'm going out to fish"** and the other six men determine to go along with him. Now there is no small measure of contention among the commentators concerning what Peter meant by what he said. Some commentators think that he had the others had completely apostatized and were going back to the former life as fishermen.<sup>8</sup> Others argue that the disciples were just tired of being idle while waiting on Jesus to meet them as He had

commanded.<sup>9</sup> Some even argue that they were just trying to scrape up something to eat even while they were waiting.<sup>10</sup>

In Matthew, Jesus had told His disciples:

<sup>NIV</sup> **Matthew 28:16**...Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.

In mark, He had told them:

<sup>NIV</sup> **Mark 14:28**...**"But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."**

Of course, what is really interesting about that Mark passage is the next verse.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Mark 14:29**...Peter declared, **"Even if all fall away, I will not."** <sup>30</sup> **"I tell you the truth,"** Jesus answered, **"today-- yes, tonight-- before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times."** <sup>31</sup> But Peter insisted emphatically, **"Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you."** And all the others said the same.

Anyway, here's what is important. They went out and fished all night and did not catch one single fish.<sup>11</sup> They, and in particular Peter, had not learned the lesson yet that really and truly, **"Apart from Jesus they could nothing."** But they were about to learn it full well.

<sup>NIV</sup> **John 21:4**...Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup> He called out to them, **"Friends, haven't you any fish?"** **"No,"** they answered.

The expression that Jesus uses here is wonderfully familiar. It is a colloquialism something like **"My lads"** or perhaps even better as **"Hey, boys."**<sup>12</sup> Anyway, Jesus asks them a question that in Greek demands a negative answer. In Texas

we would say like this, **"Hey boys, ya'll haven't caught anything have you?"** And of course they had not. Do you realize that in all of the gospels there was not one single time that the disciples ever caught a fish without Jesus' help. Jesus knew perfectly well they weren't going to catch anything because He didn't intend for them to catch anything apart from Him. Gently, He tells them how to remedy their lack.

<sup>NIV</sup> **John 21:6**...He said, **"Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some."** When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

Now, I think it is pretty obvious that this story is intended to remind you of the story in Luke.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>NIV</sup> **Luke 5: 4**...When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." 5 Simon answered, **"Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."** 6 When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. 7 So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. 8 When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, **"Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"** 9 For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken,

Now, some commentators think that John and Luke were talking about the exact same event. They think that John and Luke took the same story and reshaped according to their liking. All that's rubbish, of course. The stories are completely different. In Luke, Peter falls at Jesus' feet and pleads with Him to depart saying, **"Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"** In John, Peter does the exact opposite. He simply dives over the side, leaving the others to handle the nets, and starts swimming to shore to meet Jesus. Look how John tells it.

<sup>NIV</sup> **John 21:7**...Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "**It is the Lord!**" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "**It is the Lord,**" he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water.<sup>14</sup> <sup>8</sup> The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. <sup>9</sup> When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to them, "**Bring some of the fish you have just caught.**" <sup>11</sup> Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn.<sup>15</sup>

Now the irony here is rich.<sup>16</sup> It recalls many of the exact same words used earlier in John especially on the night of the betrayal. Let me see if I can explain what I mean. In John 13, it said Jesus took off His outer garment and wrapped a towel around his waist and proceeded to wash the disciple's feet. You will remember that Peter protested about being washed. Here Simon Peter is already disrobed and wraps his garment (exact same phrase) around His waist and dives headlong into the water. In John 18, Peter was standing near a charcoal fire and was asked three questions. Here, Peter is standing near a charcoal fire and is asked another three questions. Both times the questions revolve around Jesus.

Now, when Peter got to shore Jesus had a charcoal fire with some fish and some bread on it but He told Peter to bring some of the fish that they had caught. Peter goes over and drags the net ashore and there are 153 fish in the net. Now, the first thing I thought about was that there were a 153 fish in the net and they were large fish. That may have meant they weighed a pound each or two pounds each or are some were really big and some were small? If they had weighed a pound each, Peter would have hauled a hundred and fifty three pounds of fish ashore. If they had weighed two pounds each, he would have hauled around three hundred pounds of fish ashore. And if they weighed more than that getting them ashore would have been a miracle in itself.

Now I was captivated by how Peter got the net ashore. All the commentators, however, are much more concerned with what the number “153” may have symbolized. One commentator is convinced that the number signified the universal nature of the church. He based his conclusion upon the statement made by Jerome, the famous Catholic translator of the Vulgate. Jerome basically said that everybody knew there were 153 kinds of fish in the world.<sup>17</sup> Hence, the 153 fish represent the fact that the church would be drawn from all the nations of the world. Now I like that except I am pretty sure there are more than 153 kinds of fish in the world. One commentator noted that 153 is the sum of all the numbers from 1 to 17 and that somehow that represents the 10 commandments and 7 gifts of the Spirit; another says the number 153 represents stands for something in itself; that is, the 100 represents the fullness of the Gentiles; the 50 represents the remnant of Israel; the 3 represents the Holy Trinity and so on<sup>18</sup>. Augustine got so wrapped up in this number he eventually was led to say, **“The mystery of this number is very great.”**

However, I think my all time favorite observation is that of Sir E.C. Hoskyns who noticed that the 153 dots can be arranged into an equilateral triangle with 17 dots on each side. Now, I’m not sure what value there is in knowing that but I suspect you can use it in the future to astonish your friends and confuse, perhaps even bewilder, your enemies.

Most of the commentators however are content to say that somehow the number “153” anticipated the fullness of the Church. I can accept that but I prefer to think that the disciples noted there were 153 fish simply because the amount of fish they counted was somewhere between 152 and 154.

Anyway, returning to the story let's look at verse 12.

<sup>NIV</sup> **John 21:12**...Jesus said to them, "**Come and have breakfast.**" None of the disciples dared ask him, "**Who are you?**" They knew it was the Lord. <sup>13</sup> Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. <sup>14</sup> This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Now, the one point I want to make is that verse 12 forms a transition to the Peter story which comes next. They knew it is the Lord and I am fairly sure the scene with the bread and the fish would have reminded them of the miracle of the loaves and fishes. However, the place John wants to go is to the story of Peter's restoration.

<sup>NIV</sup> **John 21:15**...When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "**Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?**" "**Yes, Lord,**" he said, "**you know that I love you.**" Jesus said, "**Feed my lambs.**"

Now the first thing you ought to notice is that Jesus does not call Simon Peter, Simon Peter. He calls him "**Simon, son of Jonah.**"<sup>19</sup> This would roughly equivalent to my mother calling me, "**Tommy Rufus.**" Now, I never minded being called "**Tommy**" but I knew things were not going to be pleasant when she called "**Tommy Rufus.**" You see what makes this so significant is that Jesus was the one who changed his name.

<sup>NIV</sup> **John 1:42**...And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "**You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas**" (which, when translated, is Peter).

And, in fact, he was always called Simon Peter...Simon the Rock, until you get right here to this verse. What Jesus is implying is that Peter is not *the* rock-steady, stalwart disciple his name implied. It is an excruciating rebuke.

Now the second thing to note is the question that Jesus asks Peter. It is not, **"Do you love me?"** It is rather, **"Do you love me more than these?"** Now, here's the problem.<sup>20</sup> You cannot tell in Greek what Jesus meant by **"these"**. The word may be a neuter word and if it is it refers to fish. So Jesus would have been asking, **"Do you love me more than all this fishing stuff?"** The word may be masculine. If it is then it may mean either, **"Do you love me more than these men love Me?"** or **"Do you love me more than you love these men?"**

Now there are two ways you can go. You can argue from the closer word used, in which case it almost has to be the fish. Or you can argue from previous references and it almost certainly has to be in comparison to the other men. In particular, I think you can argue that Jesus is asking, **"Do you love me more than these men love me?"** especially since Peter had basically told Jesus earlier that he would not forsake Him even if everyone else did.

Mark has Peter say:

<sup>NIV</sup> **Mark 14:29**...Peter declared, **"Even if all fall away, I will not."**

Matthew had him say:

<sup>NIV</sup> **Matthew 26:33**...Peter replied, **"Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will."**

And even John had him say,

**<sup>NIV</sup> John 13:37...Peter asked, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you."**

Now I want you to remember that question, **"Why can't I follow you...?"** I want you to remember it because it will come again in a few minutes.

Now, finally, I want to look at Peter's answer. Jesus had asked, **"Do you love me more than these?"** When Peter answers, his answer is not so bold as to fully answer the question. Instead, he answers very modestly, **"Yes Lord, you know that I love you."**

Jesus then did two things. First, He told Peter to, feed His lambs. Then, He asked Peter the same question dropping the phrase **"more than these"** and adding the word **"truly"**.

**<sup>NIV</sup> John 21:16...Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?"** He answered, **"Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."** Jesus said, **"Take care of my sheep."**

Peter answered the exact same way he did the first time and Jesus charged him to "shepherd His sheep". The Jesus turns right back around and asks him the same question with even the word **"truly"** removed.

**<sup>NIV</sup> John 21:17...The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"** Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, **"Do you love me?"** He said, **"Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."** Jesus said, **"Feed my sheep."**

Now, I want you to notice two things here. I want you to notice the way Jesus diminishes the scope of His question each time. And I want you to notice the fact that Peter's feelings are hurt by Jesus' probing questions. There are, of course, three questions for three denials.

I should add one other thing. There are a lot of commentators that make a big deal out of the words used for "love" in this exchange. They argue Jesus uses the more noble word, a word that usually means "deep committed, even spiritual love." They say that because Jesus uses the word *avgapa,w* the first two times He asks Peter if he loves Him. Peter answers Jesus uses a word signifying "friendship" or "brotherly love", the word *file,w*. The third time Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him, He changes the word to the word Peter was using, that is the word *file,w*. Peter, they argue is hurt because He realizes what Jesus has done and yet he still answers with the same word *file,w*. Presumably, Peter did that out of a sense of humility and self-deprecation. He was not willing to use the more noble word instead basically saying, **"Lord, I love you as much as I can. I would like to use the word you're using but I just can't bring myself to do that."**

The problem with that view is that John doesn't really seem to distinguish between the two forms.<sup>21</sup> Let me illustrate. In John 3:35, John uses the word you would expect to describe the Father's love for the Son.

<sup>NIV</sup> **John 3:35**...The Father loves (*ἀγαπάω*) the Son and has placed everything in his hands.

In John 5:20, John uses the word you would not expect to describe the same thing. You see what I mean? He uses the words interchangeably.

<sup>NIV</sup> **John 5:20**...For the Father loves (φιλέω) the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these.

I think that tells you that Peter is grieved perhaps because of the Jesus keeps reducing the questions He asks. He goes from, **“Do you love me more than these?”** to **“Do you truly love Me?”** to just plain old **“Do you love Me?”** Or probably even more likely, he is grieved simply because the three questions reminds Peter of his own three denials.

Now, a while ago I asked you to remember that question Peter had asked Jesus in chapter 13, **“Why can’t I follow you now?”** What we are going to see in the next couple of verses is Jesus telling Peter that he will now get to follow him, only he will have to follow him in a way that he is not going to like.

<sup>NIV</sup> **John 21:18**...**I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.** <sup>19</sup> Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, **“Follow me!”**

Now the idea here is fairly simple. Jesus is telling Peter, **“When you were young, you did as you pleased but all that is over now. You must follow me. In fact, when you get older, they will put bind you with chains and they will lead where you don’t want to go. They will stretch out your arms just as they stretched out mine. You wanted to follow Me, follow Me all the way.”**

The phrase stretch out your hands is an allusion to being crucified. Hendriksen quotes two of the church fathers:<sup>22</sup>

**Eusebius:** "But Peter seems to have preached in Pontus and Galatia and Bithynia and Cappadocia and Asia, to the Jews of the Dispersion, and at last, having come to Rome, he was crucified head downward, for so he himself had asked to suffer" (The *Ecclesiastical History* III, i).

**Tertullian:** "At Rome Nero was the first who stained with blood this rising faith. Then is Peter girt by another when he is made fast to the cross" (*Antidote for the Scorpion's Sting* XV). Cf. also Origen, *Against Celsus* II, xlv).

Most scholars believe that the Tertullian quote being older is more reliable. They think it is clear that Peter was crucified but not so clear that he was actually crucified upside down.

Now, I want to add at this point that this whole discussion of faithfulness and martyrdom and endurance was surely included as one final prod to those first century Jewish fence-straddlers who were trying to make up their mind about whether they ought to stick with Jesus or go back to the synagogue. What John is doing is saying this, **"Look, Peter knew he was going to die the death of a martyr and he never flinched. What are you afraid of? Come and join us and follow Jesus."**

Still, John is willing to show the humanity of Peter. Look at verse 20.

<sup>NIV</sup> **John 21:20**...Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, **"Lord, who is going to betray you?"**) <sup>21</sup> When Peter saw him, he asked, **"Lord, what about him?"** <sup>22</sup> Jesus answered, **"If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me."** <sup>23</sup> Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, **"If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?"**

Do you get his question? Peter is asking, **“What about John?”** It seems like there must have been a story going around that John would not die before Jesus’ return. John quashes that story right here and brings the reader back to the main point by saying, **“Jesus never said I wouldn’t die. What He said was, ‘Peter, whatever happens to John happens. That is really not your concern. Your concern ought to be that I want you...to follow Me.’”**

Then, of course, there is the conclusion to the book.

<sup>NIV</sup> **John 21:24...** This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true. <sup>25</sup> Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

The conclusion is hyperbolic. It is intended to be an exaggeration but we as Christians know truth it contains. You see John wanted to stress two points. First, he wanted to stress that he was an eyewitness to the manifold glory of Jesus. Secondly, he wanted to stress that this book, this wonderful little book of John, only contained selected snippets from the ministry of Jesus. But those snippets are true and as such adequate to cause us to cling to matchless beauty Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now I said at the beginning of this lesson that if I had been the author of John I would have ended the book at the end of chapter 20. If I had done so, of course, I would have been wrong for this chapter reminds us of the truth we know about Jesus, He always does better than we expect. He always does more than we expect.

You see this chapter leaves us with a restored Peter and sense of hope and endurance. It leaves us with the same feeling of the little boy who once came up to Dr. McGee after a sermon he preached some fifty years ago in a small country church in Greenville, Texas.

Dr. McGee had poured his heart out into exposition of one of the great gospel stories and a little barefoot boy, wearing only a pair of overalls came up and tugged on his coat to get his attention. Finally, when Dr. McGee looked down the boy said to him, **“Mister, I never, um, I never knew Jesus was so wonderful.”** Dr. McGee said the little boy turned and ran across a field of cotton beside the church until he disappeared from sight.

I think this chapter and this gospel in particular leave you feeling just that way. Every time I read it, I think to myself, **“You know I never knew Jesus was so wonderful.”**

And he is, don't you think?

---

<sup>1</sup> Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishers, 1997), 655.

<sup>2</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel & Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1983), 398. “The act circumstances of the composition of the Gospel are concealed from us, but we may picture the Evangelist entrusting his *magnum opus* to his associates, who, before publishing, added this epilogue which they had heard from his own lips, in form in which he had narrated it.”

<sup>3</sup> John W. Pryor, *John: Evangelist of the Covenant People* (Downer's Grove, Illinois: IVP Press, 1992), 91.

<sup>4</sup> C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 431. Dodd writes, “For the sake of completeness we may here take note of the appendix (chapter 21). It has the effect of compensating for the exclusive attention to Jerusalem in chapter 20 (where the Fourth Gospel resembles the Third) by introducing an appearance of Christ in

Galilee (thus assimilating the Fourth Gospel to the First, which has appearances both in Jerusalem (Matt. 28: 9–10) and in Galilee (28:16)). The interest in Jerusalem and the south is in general characteristic of the Fourth Gospel, and the motives of the appendix are more akin to those of the Synoptics. At most we may recognize Johannine traits in the scene between Jesus and Peter in 21:15-17. The emphasis on agaph as the link between Christ and His disciples, and the idea of the flock, recall earlier passages. But it can hardly be said that theological motives have been at work; and the naive conception of Christ's second Advent in 21:22 is unlike anything else in the Fourth Gospel. For the rest, it may be that those critics are right who surmise in the background some adjustment of the claims of Rome (for Peter) and Ephesus (for the Beloved Disciple)."

<sup>5</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John 29A* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 1077. "From textual evidence, including that of such early witnesses as P<sup>66</sup> and Tertullian, the Gospel was never circulated without chapter 21. (A 5th or 6th-century Syriac ms. [British Museum cat. add. no. 14453] that ends John 20:25 has apparently lost the final folios.)"

<sup>6</sup> B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John* (1881; rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 299. "It is important to observe that St John takes account of both groups of appearances of the Risen Lord. St Matthew only notices the appearance to "the eleven" in Galilee, and St Luke only appearances at Jerusalem."

<sup>7</sup> Bruce, 399. Bruce argues that the inclusion of the two unnamed disciples occurred to make the identification of the "beloved disciple" more difficult.

<sup>8</sup> E. C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, vol. 2, (London: Faber & Faber, 1942), 660. "There is no reason to suppose that the number seven symbolizes a perfect number. It is, rather, a truncated twelve. One has betrayed the Lord to death, all, except the Beloved Disciple (see note on 19:27) had fled, and now, at the suggestion of Simon, the seven who remain together go back to their fishing. The scene is one of complete apostasy, and is the fulfillment of 16:32." **Seems pretty rough to me.**

Cf. Brown, p. 1068-9. Brown quotes McDowell saying that he argues, "that the present tense of the verb 'to go' expresses more than momentary intention: Peter is going back to his old way of life and will stay with it. The point of the story then is that Jesus caused Peter to change his mind, especially in verse 15. 'Do you love me more than these [nets, boats, etc.]?' This is dubious."

<sup>9</sup> Bruce, 399.

<sup>10</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 36: John*, (Dallas, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1998)

<sup>11</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 670. "Although there is evidence that the night time was considered best for fishing on Galilee, one wonders if the Evangelist is not still employing one of his favorite symbols (Cf. notes on 3:2, 19-21; 13:30; 20:1). They are coming to grips with the resurrection, but they still have not learned the profound truth that apart from Christ they can do nothing (15:5), and so *that night they caught nothing* (Cf. Lk. 5:5)."

<sup>12</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament: V.5 The Fourth Gospel & Hebrews* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1932), 319.

Cf. Walter Bauer, (Rvd. By Arndt, Gingrich and Danker) *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 614b. Cf. Henry George Liddell, and Robert Scott, *A Greek English Lexicon Rvd. By Sir Henry Stuart Jones* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 1287c.

<sup>13</sup> Pryor, p. 92.

<sup>14</sup> James Hope Moulton, & George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament: Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-Literary Sources* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1930), 133. They prove the word can be figurative which is highly probable. Jews were not especially apt to parade around in the buff.

<sup>15</sup> Pryor, 93. Pryor writes: With the unbroken net symbolizing the oneness of the church (d. 10:16; 17:20-21), and 'a hundred and fifty-three' having something to do with the universal nature of the people of God (see the commentaries), the editor wants the people of his day to be both obedient to and confident in the mission charge of Jesus.

<sup>16</sup> Paul D. Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 98. Duke is very perceptive. He writes: "The conversation after breakfast is an obviously ironic play upon Simon's threefold denial by another charcoal fire (*anthrakia*, cf. 18:18; 21:9). Jesus' three probing questions offer gentle and excruciating reproach. Simon, no longer the *alazon*, (in drama, a person who claims to be more than he is) endures the shame and answers with appropriate humility. Jesus' threefold response assigns to him the task of a shepherd. In Johannine thought that role is not merely pastoral, it portends voluntary death, for "the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (10:11). Peter has already unwittingly anticipated this vocation by claiming in 13:37 that he would lay down life for Jesus. In 21:18-19 Jesus confirms this martyrdom by cryptically alluding to Simon's own crucifixion. Only after this solemn revelation does Jesus say to Simon with great gravity, "Follow me" (vss. 19, 22).

Peter had wanted to know at the Supper why he could not follow *now*. Here at breakfast, after the dark night of his own denial and the death of Jesus, he knows at last why following had been impossible; and, perhaps to his amazement, it is precisely at this point that he hears the call: "Follow." Overeagerness melts before such a call. Jesus tells him that when the final following comes, this hitherto impulsive disciple will not wish to go (vs. 18). But go he will, no longer the *alazon*, but the disciple of the Shepherd who lays down his life.

<sup>17</sup> Charles H. Talbert, *Reading John: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1992), 260. Cf. Hoskyns, 661-2. Talbert cites Hoskyns as his source. Here's the quote: "The 153 fish symbolize the universal outreach of the church's fishing expedition in obedience to Jesus' command. There is little agreement among interpreter's about why this is so. For example, Jerome, in his commentary on Ezekiel 47:9-12, says: Writers on the nature and properties of animals, who have learned *Halieutica* in Latin as

well as in Greek, among whom is the learned poet Oppianus Cilix, say that there are one hundred fifty three kinds of fishes.”

<sup>18</sup> Brown, p. 1074-5. Brown goes for a while with this.

<sup>19</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1985), 1460. Naturally this insight comes from Boice. I consider a great privilege in my life to have been there at his last conference in Colorado Springs. He was the ultimate pastor/scholar.

<sup>20</sup> Philip W. Comfort, & Wendell C. Hawley, *Opening the Gospel of John: A Fresh approach for Teaching and Preaching the Fourth Gospel* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), 337. He writes: “According to the Greek, Jesus' first question to Peter could be rendered in three ways: 1) "Do you love me more than these men love me?" 2) "Do you love me more than you love these men?" 3) "Do you love me more than these things?" (i.e., all the things related to the fishing occupation). The first and the third renderings are more appropriate in this context than the second rendering, and the first seems the most appropriate because Peter had claimed, in the presence of all the disciples, that he would never forsake Jesus, even if all the others did (see Matt. 26:33; Mark 14:29; John 13:37), implying that he had more love for Jesus than the others did. Of course, Peter's claims had not been realized; instead, he had denied Jesus three times.”

<sup>21</sup> Robert Deffinbaugh, *That You Might Believe: A Study of the Gospel of John* (Available online NetBible.Org.), 547. He writes: “Fifth, caution should be exercised in making too much of the two different words for “love” which are employed in this text. The two verbs are agapao and phileo. The first two times Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him, the word for love is agapao. The third time Jesus asks, He employs the term phileo. Every time Peter responds to Jesus’ question, indicating his love, he employs the word phileo. The distinctions that some make between these two terms may hold true in some cases, and for some authors. They do not seem to hold true for John, who often uses different terms for the same concept. When commentators do seek to emphasize the distinctions between the two Greek words John uses, they do not agree as to what the meaning and emphasis of these terms are. We should keep in mind that when Jesus spoke to Peter and asked him these three questions, He spoke not in Greek (the language in which the Gospel of John is written), but in Aramaic, the language spoken by the Jews of that day. The change in words may have some significance, but I hardly think it is the key to understanding the passage.”

<sup>22</sup> William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of John*, vol. .2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1953), 490.