

Epilogue: Restoration and Responsibility

John 21

September 20th, 2026

1. A Joyful _____ (21:1-14)

2. A Mercy-full _____ (21:15-23)

3. A Closing _____ (21:24-25)

4. Applying the Word
 - a. Jesus is full of _____ toward us.
 - b. Keep your eyes on _____ not on other Christians.

Questions for Discussion/Reflection on John 21

1. Can you think of any novels or movies with an epilogue? What do they add to the story? What does this epilogue (John 21) include that the Gospel of John would be lacking if it ended with chapter 20?
2. Compare and contrast John 21:1-14 with a similar fishing scene in Luke 5:1-11. How is this a full-circle moment for Peter and the other disciples?
3. What do you make of the fact that Jesus' final resurrection appearance in John with his disciples is a breakfast meeting? What similarities do you see between this scene, Jesus' first sign (John 2), and the famous sign recorded in John 6:1-15?
4. What do you observe about the question and answer interaction between Jesus and Peter?
 - a. What might Peter have been thinking when Jesus repeated His question three times?
 - b. What is the connection between Peter's love for Jesus and the command to tend/shepherd His sheep?
 - c. What is necessary for us to move on from past failures and shame as we follow Jesus?
5. Peter asks Jesus about John's future in v. 21. What do you notice about Jesus' response? What are some ways that we tend to compare ourselves to the experiences of other Christians in a similar way? What can we learn from this scene?
6. Looking at John 20:30-31 and 21:25 together, how did John under the inspiration of the Spirit decide which accounts to include in this gospel?

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Big idea: From naïve boasting to shameful failure to humble service, Jesus is faithful to us.

Intro

The gospel of John could have ended in chapter 20. That would have been a crisp conclusion.

Jesus rose, appeared to many different people, they believed in Him, John stated the purpose of the book – this is written so you may believe.

But we have one more chapter and I'm so glad we do. It's an epilogue, defined as a "concluding part that takes place after the main plot has finished."

In a novel, the epilogue might fast forward several years to show what your favorite characters are up to. In Lord of the Rings, the epilogue shows one characters wedding and multiple generations of prosperity, another writing a book, and a final departure.

John's epilogue features a joyful breakfast, a mercy-full restoration, and a closing testimony.

It's the middle scene that is most memorable and significant for us.

If you see your failures large in the rearview mirror of your life and you can't get past them, Jesus' words to Peter are worth considering.

1. A Joyful **Breakfast** (21:1-14)

- a. We don't know how much later these events are.
 - i. It's long enough that they traveled from Jerusalem to the Sea of Galilee (here called the Sea of Tiberias because of the town of Tiberias on the western shore). In Mark 14:28 Jesus says he will go ahead of them to Galilee after his resurrection.
 - ii. The ascension of Jesus in Acts 1:3 is 40 days after the resurrection and they were back in Jerusalem at that time, so this scene takes place within that 40-day window.
- b. 6 of the disciples follow Peter out to fish.
 - i. They were fishmen by trade, so they may just be earning some income or getting fish to eat. No reason to think they have abandoned Jesus or His mission for them.
- c. Once again Jesus appears and they don't recognize him.
 - i. Could be the same reason Mary didn't, could also just be that he was on shore and they were out in the water.
 - ii. "children" is like "guys" or "boys" – its friendly and affectionate.
- d. The scene is reminiscent of an earlier scene in Luke 5:1-11 as Jesus was originally gathering His disciples.
 - i. Jesus was on the shore of the same lake and some of the same men were with Peter, the sons of Zebedee. He went into a boat with Peter and directed him to put his net out in the deep water to catch. They hadn't caught anything all night but Peter obeyed and caught a great quantity of fish. In this case their nets began to break. Peter responded with awe and terror – get away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man! Jesus told him not to fear and that from then on he would be catching men.
- e. That maybe explains why when they caught a great number at His direction Peter said, "it is the Lord."

- i. Peter threw on his cloak and dove in to swim to shore.
 - 1. Impulsive, enthusiastic – and a decent swimmer.
 - ii. The others were left to pull the fish in.
 - f. They likely counted the fish out of amazement for how many there were and perhaps because they were going to sell them.
 - g. The charcoal fire only appears one another time – the night that Peter denied knowing Jesus he was by a charcoal fire.
 - i. Now, at another fire in the light of morning not the dark of night, Jesus meets with Peter.
2. A Mercy-full **Restoration** (21:15-23)
- a. I know that's not how you spell "merciful" – but I'm taking some artistic license for emphasis. It's bad spelling to emphasize good news.
 - b. Thomas blustered and then doubted. Peter went even further. He confidently declared his own faithfulness to the end and then three times denied even knowing Jesus.
 - i. He failed, he wept bitterly (Luke 22:62).
 - 1. More weeping but even a different type of weeping. Mary wept from loss Peter wept from shame.
 - ii. There's an elephant in the room – on the shore – Peter's denial.
 - 1. You know the awkwardness when there is an unresolved, unspoken breach in a relationship but nobody has talked about it. You might go along in the conversation, but it's still hanging over things.
 - 2. Jesus has already interacted with Peter. This wasn't the first thing He brought up, but now on the shores of the Sea of Galilee with a fresh catch of fish and a full stomach, Jesus addresses the issue.
 - c. 1st question – Do you love me more than these?
 - i. "These" could be the fish – as in, do you love more than this livelihood? The disciples, "more than you love these disciples."
 - ii. More likely, "do you love me more than these other disciples love me?"
 - 1. Why would Jesus ask that?
 - 2. **Matthew 26:33** But Peter said to Him, "*Even* though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away."
 - 3. **John 13:37** Peter said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You."
 - 4. **Luke 22:33** But he said to Him, "Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!"
 - 5. His self-confidence was often couched in comparative language, so now Jesus asks Him a comparative question.
 - iii. Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.
 - 1. He does use a different word for "love" than Jesus. Jesus used "*agape*" and Peter used "*phileo*." Sometimes we make too much of the differences between the two but they are used interchangeably.

2. But it could be that Peter is no longer confidently asserting his own commitment and hesitates to even use the same word as Jesus.
3. But he does appeal to Jesus' understanding and knowledge not his own demonstration of love.

iv. Tend my lambs

1. It's a word that means more than "feed" – it means to shepherd and care for.
2. Peter's love for Jesus will be demonstrated not merely declared. He will demonstrate it by caring for the people Jesus leaves behind.
3. Although they have been fishing, the analogy is not a fishing analogy but a shepherding analogy – tend my lambs, feed my sheep, etc.

v. That seems like a legitimate conversation. But then it continues and Jesus asks again.

d. 2nd question – Do you love me?

- i. No comparison this time. Not "more than these" just flat out, do you love me?
 1. Do you really love me? That's the bottom line.
- ii. Once again, same answer. Same different word for love.
- iii. Once again, shepherd my sheep.
 1. Here's what your love for Me will do – here's the extension of it – love my people well by shepherding them.
 2. Parallelism to "tend my lambs" – not meant to see what's different but similar.

e. 3rd question – Do you love Me?

- i. Uses the same word for love as Peter – *phileo*
 1. Perhaps, "do you even *phileo* me?"
 2. Explains why Peter was grieved. Either by the repetition itself or the change of words, Jesus appears to be questioning even the level of love Peter affirmed.
- ii. You know all things. You know that I love you.
 1. This is the Peter who several times corrected Jesus.
 - a. You won't die!
 2. Now he defers to Jesus' knowledge even of his own heart.
- iii. For the final time Jesus says to tend My sheep.
 1. A few observations on feeding/tending to Jesus' sheep.
 2. The sheep belong to Jesus – MY sheep
 - a. They are His people, the ones who follow Him and hear His voice in John 10.
 - b. They don't belong to Peter any more than you belong to me – Jesus' people belong to Jesus.
 3. The sheep need to be fed (tended) – Peter's job was to feed them a steady diet of truth.
 4. The sheep need to be shepherded – lead, feed, guide.

5. A shepherd's first priority is to feed the sheep – not build a building or gather a crowd.
 6. A shepherd must be motivated by love for Jesus.
 - f. Jesus matched three denials with three opportunities for Peter to affirm his love for Jesus.
 - i. Jesus gave Peter restored responsibilities to serve.
 - g. Even the prophetic word about Peter's death carried comfort. (21:18-19)
 - i. I had always read this as a sad future for Peter.
 - ii. Church history tells us that Peter was killed as a martyr – someone led him where he did not wish to go – to his death.
 - iii. But it indicates he would finish well.
 - iv. After failing and denying Jesus, perhaps the question in his mind is, will I do it again? Will I fail? He may falter along the way (and he did – i.e. with Paul in Galatians), but he perseveres until the end.
 - h. Peter then asks, "what about John?"
 - i. If I were to sum up Jesus' response to the question it would be, "it's none of your business."
 - ii. You follow me.
 - iii. Our responsibility is to follow Jesus.
 1. Our brothers and sisters in Christ are to follow Jesus.
 2. Some things are of course the same – love God, love people, turn from sin, etc.
 3. But the path looks different for different believers –
 - a. Some face unending physical suffering while others remain relatively healthy.
 - b. Some are alone and need to learn to follow Jesus with more solitude. Others are surrounded by family.
 - c. Some face poverty and the challenge of contentment. Others face wealth and the challenge of greed.
 - d. Some follow Jesus overseas, others stay and send them.
 4. Our tendency is to say, "what about them? And Jesus says, "YOU follow Me!" Keep your eyes on Jesus, not on each other.
3. A Closing **Testimony** (21:24-25)
- a. This is the disciple who is testifying about these things.
 - i. The disciple whom Jesus loved
 - ii. The disciple who was near him at the supper when Judas was identified
 - iii. The disciple who Peter wanted to compare himself to
 - iv. John
 - b. "We" know that his testimony is true
 - i. Who is the "we"?

- ii. **1 John 1:2** and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—

- 1. The apostolic we – the authority of the apostles – the plural for the authority of the apostles.

- c. Jesus is so great that all we get in the gospels is a sample of his miracles and teaching.

- i. I wonder if we'll learn more when we are with Him one day.

- d. Belief in John

- i. *See chart*

- ii. The Gospel of John was written so that you would believe that Jesus is the promised Messiah and Son of God. (20:30-31)

- iii. Prologue 1:1-18

- iv. Beginnings of belief 1-4 – John's testimony, wedding at Cana, Nicodemus, woman at the well

- v. Development of unbelief 5-12 – plan to kill because of Sabbath and making self equal w God, feeds 5k, teaches, light of the world, heals the blind, Lazarus, enters Jer.

- vi. Strengthening of belief 13-17 – washes feet, teaches, prepares, prays

- 1. Jesus seeks to strengthen and confirm he belief of His followers in preparation for his death. Key idea is that of relationships

- vii. Consummation of unbelief 18-19

- 1. Rejection and crucifixion

- viii. Confirmation of belief 20

- 1. Resurrection

- ix. Responsibilities of belief 21 – feed my sheep

- 4. Applying the Word

- a. Jesus is full of ***mercy*** toward us.

- i. Richard Sibbes: There's more mercy in Christ than sin in us.

- b. Keep your eyes on ***Jesus*** not on other Christians.

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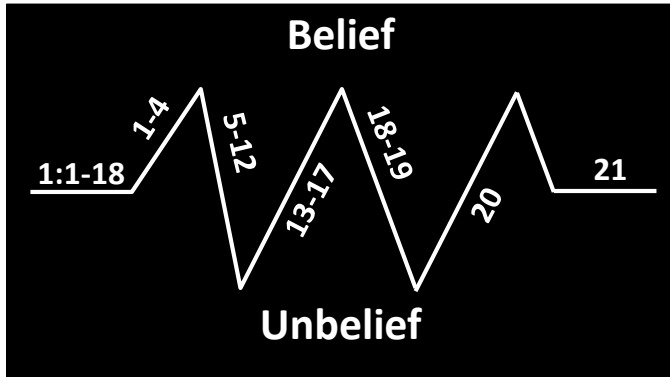
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