

John 21

The End of John's gospel... and the
Beginning of the Church -
Feed the World!

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John 21

As we read chapter 21, let's ask ourselves: why does John end his gospel this way?

Read John 21: *After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. ² Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. 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.*

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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." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ He said to him 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, "Tend my sheep." 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 everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. ¹⁸ Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." ¹⁹ (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me."

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is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?"

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So far, how have all the signs worked?

Examples:

- Water into wine
- The healing of the man born blind
- The healing at the pool
- The feeding of the 5000

Up to this point in John's Gospel we have always found the SIGN (work) being followed by explanatory WORDS.

In other words – always WORD linked. We don't need to guess what the miracle means... Jesus and John tell us!

So what should we expect here in this final miracle?

vs 1-14: The Work - MIRACLE

vs 15-19: The WORD - all about the feeding and tending of God's people.

The miracle – there are any number of common 'guesses' this miracle could be about. Here are just a few of the suggestions:

- Is Jesus showing the disciples that they are to "go fishing for people"?!

Those that suggest this say that Jesus is reminding the disciples of a previous incident when he called Peter and told him in that ***"from now on you will be fishing for men."***

- The trouble is... that incident was in Luke's Gospel and not John's! Hardly likely therefore!
- Is there some significance in the number of fish?!
- Surely it is much more likely that this miracle follows the same pattern of all the others – so the meaning of the sign is explained by the word that follows.

What does Jesus teach about in vs 15-19?

- He talks of the Apostles' role in feeding his people (the lambs)

v15: ***"Feed my lambs."***

What does Jesus DO in the miracle?

- He feeds his apostles!

v12: ***Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.”***

It seems most likely, then, that this miraculous sign is a “feeding” miracle rather than a “fishing” miracle. Jesus feeds his discouraged and down-hearted disciples and then he re-commissions them... to feed us!

Throughout vs 15-19 Jesus shows that he is re-commissioning Peter to feed his people:

- v15: ***“Feed my lambs.”***
- v16: ***“Tend my sheep.”***
- v17: ***“Feed my sheep.”***
- v19: ***“Follow me.”***

Remember John 10 v 11: ***“I am the Good Shepherd”***
and John 10 v 27: ***“My sheep hear my voice”***

So then, Jesus is feeding his Apostles before he then re-commissions them to feed his people.

Did you notice...

- The miracle of the catch was purely for the benefit of the Apostles - to underline Jesus’ position as the one who will provide for them when they go out to feed others.
Jesus didn’t need the catch – he already had provided fish:

v9: ***When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread.***

- They were back at the Sea of Tiberias which we know was another name for the Sea of Galilee...

...The disappointed and disillusioned disciples have headed back to the Sea of Galilee where we originally encountered them in chapter 1! The risen Jesus comes to find them and re-employ them!

- And did you notice the geographical detail and the specific names and the number?!

So if we are right - that this miracle and the explanatory word of verses 15-25 is about RE-COMMISSIONING the disciples for service - what then do we learn about Peter, John and the foundation of the Church?

Peter

How was Peter's morale and reputation at the end of chapter 18?!

As we finished ch 18, Peter could not be more discredited and discouraged.

- He had failed Jesus three times... with three denials – coming to a finish in ch 18 v 27:

John 18 v 27: *Peter again denied it, and at once a rooster crowed.*

So what do we find in ch 21 vs 15-17? What does Jesus ask Peter?

- v15: ***“Do you love me more than these?”***
- v 16: ***“Do you love me?”***
- v17: ***“Do you love me?”***

How does Peter respond?

- v15: ***“Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.”***
- v16: ***“Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.”***
- v17: ***Peter was grieved 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.”***

Note that Peter is asked the same question 3 times!!

From the position of utter failure... and (we can presume) a feeling of total despair... to the entrusted leader of God's Church on earth...

THIS is a DELIBERATE “re-commissioning”

- And just as with the fishing – where it was not the experience of the fishermen that made the catch - it was Jesus who filled the nets to overflowing...
- Here it will not be Peter's experience that equips him... it is Christ who now re-employs him, warts and all!

We (the sheep) will be fed by Jesus – through the Apostles – led by Peter.

- v15: ***“Feed my lambs”***
- v16: ***“Tend my sheep”***
- v17: ***“Feed my sheep”***

So Peter is commissioned... let's look at the preparation:

- 1 v 42: He is named as ***Cephas*** – the Rock!

➤ 14 v 26:

John 14 v 26: *But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.*

- 15 v 26: ***“The Holy Spirit will bear witness about me (Jesus).”***
- 15 v 27: ***“You (Apostles) will bear witness about me (Jesus).”***
- 16 vs 12-15: The Holy Spirit will come as the Spirit of ***ALL Truth.***
- 16 vs 12-15: The Holy Spirit ***“will guide you into all the truth.”***

And the way the flock is to be fed is through the teaching of Jesus' WORD! It is really important that we see here HOW Peter is to feed the flock.

So – ALL the truth about Jesus will be given to the Apostles – who are there to feed the flock.

All Christians will agree that Peter is given POLE position amongst the disciples and that the church is to be built on him.

The desire for the church to be built on Peter is a right one.

BUT - What is it about Peter's job description that Jesus specifies?

...He is to TEACH JESUS' WORD = v15 ***“Feed my lambs”!***

Remember John 10 v 11: ***“I am the Good Shepherd”***

and John 10 v 27: ***“My sheep hear my voice”***

Some Christians suggest that the way Peter “feeds the flock” is through the sacramental ministry of communion... and by the clergy of the church being connected to Peter through an unbroken succession of one generation of clergy laying hands of consecration on the next generation.... the clergy then distribute bread and “feed” the flock.

Once again there are REAL problems here! Not least that in John's Gospel there is no record of the Lord's Supper or Communion!! It seems hardly likely that this is what Jesus is referring to when he says ***“feed my sheep”***...

It is MUCH more likely that he has in mind a WORD-based ministry - NOT a sacramental laying on of hands – one to another from the line of Peter!!

...Especially when we remember the sheep/shepherd language of John 10:

The true sheep of Jesus' flock ***“hear his voice”!***

(Remember, also, that in our study of John chapter 6, we saw that Jesus used the picture of bread and water metaphorically to speak of FAITH in him, not literally to speak of the Lord's Supper.)

What, then, is the issue here?

- The TRUTH of the Gospel is the issue – the issue is NOT can I trace the clergy’s ordination line back to Peter... but rather... is this Bible teacher teaching the same gospel as Peter?!

Historical (SECULAR) evidence is that Christianity grew within the Roman Empire at a constant rate of approximately 40% throughout the decades from 40 AD to 350 AD...despite the cruellest of suppression and the most ardent attempts to crush and wipe out the early church.

So by the time of the Emperor Constantine some 33,000,000 have become Christians representing 56% of the Empire!

See where it all starts?

- Being fed by the Apostles WORD
- Aided by ***the Spirit of ALL Truth!***

A growing ministry MUST be based on the teaching of the Apostles in the Gospels if it is to survive, nurture and grow!

Jesus knows what will happen – he knows the outcome – but by telling us that he knows Peter will be martyred, Jesus stops us from worrying that something went horribly wrong with the project!

Read John 21 vs 18-19: *“Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.”*¹⁹ *(This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, “Follow me.”*

- History tells us that Peter was crucified upside down by the Romans.

John

In vs 20-25, the focus shifts to John.

Read John 21 vs 20-25: *Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who had been reclining at table close to him 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 this man?”*²² *Jesus said to him, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!”*

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Verse 20 refers to ***the disciple whom Jesus loved*** – surely this is John, the Apostle and the author of this Gospel.

Why does John record this incident?

- John gives us this detail to set the record straight and “scotch” what was clearly an early rumour... which probably had grown seeing as how he was the only one to reach old age.

v 24 - John finishes this book by saying – “I BEAR WITNESS – IT’S TRUE!”

Summary 1

Jesus’ priority is the ‘feeding of his sheep’, so that they might have life.

- Where will we be fed, and how?
- What are we going to do to get fed?

Summary 2

So - 21 chapters after we started this journey together, what has John taught us?

Remember his purpose?

John 20 vs 30-31: Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Questions to contemplate:

- How have these studies changed my view of who Jesus is?
 - As the Christ?
 - As the Son of God?

- Has the Spirit of Truth given us an understanding of GRACE – God’s Riches at Christ’s Expense – and TRUTH?

John 1 v 14: *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

- How have these studies helped me to understand what it means to **have life in his name**?
- Has Jesus changed our thinking and our heart as we have studied his word, so that we belong in God’s family?

John 1 v 12: *But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...*

- Could I now write my name in that same verse from chapter 1 v 12 :

To.....*who did receive him, towho believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God!*

- If so – what joy!! We bring NOTHING – the God of Creation has done all that is required... our part is simply to accept the FREE gift!

John 1 v 4: *In him was life, and the life was the light of men.*

John 3 vs 16-17: *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*

John 6 v 35: *Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”*

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