

The Gospel of John Pt. 31

John 21:1-25

Big Idea

As Jesus ascends to the Father, He reminds His disciples of the commission that He has given them. He calls them, and us, to live as He lived, finding our strength in His sovereign Lordship in our lives.



Exposition – John 21:1-25

The final chapter! The life of Jesus is action packed, and for most of us we hate to see the story of His earthly ministry conclude. However, it is His ascension that inaugurates the life of the church. It is now that the real story of God’s mission for us begins. In this final chapter Jesus and His disciples share an inspirational moment where we can see His miracle working power, His love, His sovereignty, and His mission for us.

1. Jesus Appears at the Sea of Galilee (V1-14)

- A. (V1-2) – “Sea of Tiberias” (only again in 6:1) is another name for the Sea of Galilee (Also known as the Lake Gennesaret).
“Manifested Himself in this way” – the resurrected Jesus often appears without an approach. Jesus waffles between physical form and spiritual form often in this 40-day period. He appeared to Mary at the tomb, to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, to the group of disciples, later to Thomas, and now at Galilee, in this way. There are seven disciples listed as present for this narrative.
- B. (V3) – It is often said that Peter was being unspiritual to return to fishing when Jesus had called him to be a fisher of men. However, the disciples had returned to Galilee in obedience to Jesus’ instruction. And, it only seems natural for them to occupy themselves with fishing while they waited for Jesus to meet them.
- C. (V4-6) – The Greek word we get “Children” from is *paidia*, the same root we get the word “pediatric” from. The disciples don’t recognize Jesus, but whether it was because of the lack of light, the distance, or because Jesus prevented them from recognizing Him is unclear. This was the case also with Mary at the tomb and with the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Obviously, it was Jesus who filled the net with fish after such an arbitrary change. Peter’s mind must have been called back to when Jesus filled his nets three and a half years earlier (Luke 5:1f) when He called Peter to be His disciple.
- D. (V7) – It was John that recognized Jesus first. John continues to refer to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved”. Peter was minimally clothed due to the heat and vigorous nature of casting and retrieving nets. He puts on his mantle before jumping into the water in a moment of excited joy over the Lord’s arrival.
- E. (V8-14) – Those remaining on the boat bring the haul of fish to the shore and when they arrive Jesus has already begun a breakfast of fish and bread. It seems He created this as He did the feeding of the 5000 in John 6.
John records additional details of the miracle. Not only did Jesus provide an enormous catch of fish after an unsuccessful night by professional fishermen, He also preserved the net which was expected to have been torn by the massive weight of the catch.

John mentions that it this was actually Jesus' third post-resurrection appearance to the disciples. He does this to further the presentation of evidence that Jesus is the Messiah. Not only did He appear, but He did it on multiple occasions.

2. Peter Loves Jesus (V15-17)

- A. The fact that Jesus actually eats breakfast here is often used to explain that His resurrected form was not merely a spirit, an apparition. Rather Jesus was resurrected to a glorified body.

Jesus asks the question, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" three times. In each case Jesus refers to Peter as Simon, son of John. After each of Peter's responses the Lord instructs him to care for Jesus' followers. He uses three unique phrases: "Tend my lambs"; "Shepherd my sheep"; "Tend my sheep".

In the first two questions Jesus uses the Greek word *agape* to inquire about Jesus' love, but in the last question He uses the Greek word *phileo*. In biblical literature when two synonyms are used in close proximity it is meant to emphasize their differences. Both of these words refer to love, but of different types. *Agape* love is unconditional, is not based on the merit of the person loved, but rather on them as an image bearer of God. Whereas *phileo* is best described as affection, fondness and is companionable and relational.

While agape is a more universally understood meaning of love that is shown to a person from no doing of their own, I'm intrigued that Jesus chose to use 'phileo' as a way to force Peter to think deeper. He wanted to know if Peter loved Him not just because of who He was in God, but rather that they had built a deep and intimate friendship. He wanted to know that Peter cared about Him as a person and a brother. He wanted Peter to know what true reconciliation looked like and it required both kinds of love. – Gary Edmonds

3. Jesus' Lordship (V18-25)

- A. (V18-19) – Jesus prophesies about how Peter would ultimately die for the sake of the gospel and his devotion to Jesus.
- Peter lived and ministered for more than three decades after this prophesy. It is thought that he was executed in 67-68 A.D. under Emperor Nero when he was crucified upside down. In his epistles he said that persecution brings glory to God (1 Pet. 4:14-16).
- B. (V20-23) – After Jesus has shared how Peter would be martyred for his devotion to Christ, he asks Jesus about John, "Lord, and what about this man?" Jesus' response is massively misunderstood. It was rumored that John would live until the Lord's return. But, that is not at all what Jesus said. Jesus was simply saying that John's life, good or bad, was not Peter's concern. Each of us are responsible for our own lives, "You follow Me!" Incidentally, all of the disciples are known to have been martyred except for John. Jewish tradition holds that his execution was attempted by boiling him in a pot of oil, but he was miraculously spared. John lived to an old age and ministered faithfully to the churches around Ephesus as an old man.
- C. (V24) – John closes out his gospel with this reminder that he was a personal witness to the events included in the gospel. It has always been understood that eyewitness testimony is the most compelling evidence. In fact, this truth is often seen in the dialogue between Jesus and the Jews.
- D. (V25) – Finally, John's account of the life of Jesus is not exhaustive. His gospel contains only the details of the events that he was inspired to include, but that there were many other activities that made up the whole of the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ.