

The Gospel According To John

Epilogue

John 21:1-25

Jesus Appears to His Disciples by the Sea (v. 1-14)

Following the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples have left Jerusalem and returned to Galilee. The Sea of Tiberias is an alternative name for Lake Galilee.

The word “showed” in verse one, is interesting. It carries the idea of revelation – revealed (i.e. John 1:31; 2:11; 17:6). The implication is that this resurrection appearance is a revelatory act. It is not just about being present with the disciples, it is a revelation of Jesus – revealing things the disciples need to know.

The disciples are back at home – back at their job fishing. (No reproach for this. They had to eat and feed their families.) It is here at home that Jesus reaches out to them... the Sea of Galilee where they had seen so many marvelous works and wonders (i.e. walking on water; large catch of fish; wind and waves stilled etc.)

Into their daily routine, Jesus enters to teach them four things about Himself.

It is the Lord who provides for our needs

V. 3b – they caught nothing! They worked hard but had nothing to show for it. How we need to learn and re-learn the lesson of dependence upon God.

Jesus knows where the fish are, because He has predestined them to be there. He is not a fortune teller or future teller – He determines the future. He controls it. He doesn't look down the halls of time and see what creatures will do of their own free will and then tells us what will happen. (i.e. see Isa. 46:9-11).

As they are pulling in the fish, all of a sudden, Peter gets it. “We've been here before ... in this situation It's the Lord!” How many times has the Lord been our help again and again?

It is the Lord who prospers our work

v. 6 - He prepared them to be fishers of men. (Compare v. 3, 6 with John 15:5 – without Jesus, you can do nothing.)

It is the Lord who presents Himself

He is the greatest gift!

V. 10 – He has them add to the meal the fruit of “their” labor. He brings them into fellowship in the labor. The disciples contribute – as the Lord enables.

It is the Lord with whom with fellowship in love

v. 12-14 All day long do we speak with and live Jesus?

Jesus with Peter (v. 15-25)

Jesus continues to disciple Peter – moving him away from self-esteem to Christ esteem. This was all (including Peter’s fall) part of Jesus’ prep and training for Peter.

Should Peter be restored to a position of leadership? After all, he publicly denied the Lord. Yes, we know he is forgiven, but will he be restored to his role as an apostle? That is the great grace we see displayed in Jesus Christ. Jesus confronts Peter publicly, so all can see Peter’s heart and hear Jesus’ commission. Peter’s sin (denial) was public and Jesus restores him publicly.

The setting is the beach in the early morning. Compare the coal fire in John 18:25 where Peter was keeping bad company. In light of the rebellious sin, I can’t help but think this fire and the presence of Jesus would open the “scab.” When Jesus calls him, “Simon Peter” it would remind him who he was (John 1:42). (i.e. “Before you were an apostle – I called you.”)

Peter had been acting like the old Simon. Do you understand what it is to behave like you were – like you weren’t even a Christian? If so, then you can understand the pain of this. Oh but for grace! This is good for us – the godly sorrow that leads to repentance.

We now have Jesus call on Peter for 3 public confessions. Jesus did not ask: “Do you promise that the next time you are in the presence of My enemies, you will confess My name? No, there is a deeper issue of the heart – for out of the heart the mouth speaks. If you fall into sin, the problem is not loving Jesus enough. Do you love Jesus? We may know much and do much, but do we love Christ? If we have no love we are no better than sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.

More than these?

When Jesus asks Peter, “Do you love Me more than these?” there are three possibilities.

Option 1: More than he loves the other disciples. This seems unlikely, as it doesn’t really fit the context.

Option 2: More than the fish (or fishing). This might be possible – Jesus or the things of this world.

Option 3: More than the other disciples love Jesus. This certainly seems to fit the context, as Peter viewed his love as supreme. Before, he made statements like: even if all these others forsake you, I will never. Etc. He did not say “we.” (see John 13:37-38; Mark 14:29-31). This was Peter’s problem. He had a problem of self-confidence, but apart from Jesus you can do nothing.

“Do you still feel that way, Peter?” He was asked this right in the presence of those to whom he had felt superior. It was a humbling moment.

Do you love Me?

There are two different words for love in this passage.

- agape – used by Jesus the first 2 times.

- phileo (having affection for, fond of – some overlap with agape) Peter always answers with this word.

The third time Jesus uses the term phileo, which seems to result in Peter being saddened. (i.e. Are you sure you are even fond of Me?)

Ministry described in verbs (i.e. tend, feed ... not be a pastor)

Each time Jesus gives Peter a task.

First: “feed My lambs.” (i.e. to teach) Isa. 40:11 – lambs; young, needy, children in the faith – who need particular care – because you have a love for Me that is humbled.

Second: Jesus drops the comparison (o.k. you don’t love me more than these – do you love ME at all?) “Tend My sheep” – the flock in general – pastor or shepherd My sheep (i.e. discipline, assist etc.)

Third: Now Jesus uses Peter’s word. Do you really have affection for Me? Now Peter really has to examine himself. How much do I really love Him?

Jesus – “Are you sure you love me?”

Peter – “Lord, You know me better than I do.”

Peter no longer trusts himself. He has reached the end of himself. “You’ve searched me and known me – I leave the final judgment to You. I want to love You.” Peter has been restored. Now he is called to demonstrate that love by caring for other Christians (1 John 3:14, 18). Ministering to His people, reveals our love for Christ (words are easy – just ask Peter!) The one forgiven much, loves much, so it is all a part of your growth (i.e. Peter, when you return, strengthen your brethren; Luke 7:47; 22:31-34).

Following Jesus for better and for worse

It is easy to commit to someone for the better. When worse comes, it is common to cry out with questions (why or even, why not my friend?) Peter had claimed several times he would lay down his life for his Lord. Now Jesus is inviting him to do what he had always claimed he would do.

Jesus tells Peter what is going to happen to him and then calls him to follow Him. (How’s that for an altar call?) If you are going to follow Me, then you are going to need to behave like a condemned man. He needs to be like a person carrying his cross publicly down the streets of Jerusalem. You are no longer in charge of your own life.

To stretch out one’s hands is a reference to crucifixion. Tradition tells us Peter died in Rome by crucifixion. Are you willing to die for Jesus? Are you among those who did not love their lives to the death (Rev. 12:11)? Are you willing to live for Him? In living for Him, we must “die daily.” Jesus has a right to ask you to do this. He has purchased you. “Do you not know that that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own. For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God’s.”... 1 Cor. 6:19-20; 15:31)

Jesus would be with Peter all the way to glorify God. This is our chief end. We are to seek first the kingdom of God. May we glorify God in our life and in our death. Are you prepared to die? Do you know where you are going? What will you testify to your loved ones and others watching when you are dying – if you are given time to die well?

What about him?

So often we want God’s plan for someone else. We don’t really know Peter’s motive or attitude. Perhaps he was concerned for his friend. Perhaps he was not wanting to suffer alone. The important thing is Jesus’ response – which is basically – “none of your business.” You are not his master. It is “you” you must be concerned about. It is “you” you must be hard on.

Jesus has a plan for you. It may be very different than that of your friend. Regardless - “follow Him” and glorify God. Focus on your walk, instead of worrying about the walk of others. (1 Peter 4:12-19)