

John 21 Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION

I. THE SIGNS Chs. 1-11

II. THE END Chs. 12-21

Last week, we left off in ch. 20 at v. 23.

It's the evening of Rez Sunday & Jesus has appeared to the disciples.

He's proven it's really He and not a ghost, then He imparted the Holy Spirit to them, making them born again.

Then He says . . .

23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Read through the filter of 2000 years of religious tradition this sounds like an affirmation of the priesthood's role confession, where people enter a confessional, disclose their spiritual failure, & are absolved by a priest who gives them some penance to perform.

It's that's the way we interpret what Jesus says here, then it's an example of interpreting a passage through the *wrong cultural lens*.

Remember, when studying the Word, we have to ask, "What did this interesting phrase *mean the disciples* in that room that evening?"

The answer lies in our understanding of the relationship between rabbis & disciples.

You see, the rabbis were *THE authoritative teachers* of Galilee.

Because they knew the Law so well & were recognized as having special authority from God, they could tell people whether or not they'd sinned based on how they had behaved in a given situation.

Jesus is telling the disciples they're graduating from being disciples to full-on rabbis.

Because of their abiding relationship with Him *through the Holy Spirit* He just imparted to them, He's giving them the *authority* to define the boundaries & borders of the Christian Faith.

Because the Cross & Resurrection are now accomplished facts, the Gospel carries in it the power to set men & women free from sin.

And because of their previous 3 years with Jesus, they are the ones that Gospel has been handed to.

As they go forth proclaiming it, those who respond in faith will know God's forgiveness. Those who reject it will remain lost.

24 Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." 26 And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to

you!”²⁷ Then He said to Thomas, “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.”²⁸ And Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

[Covered 2 Sundays ago]

N. Why John Wrote 20:30-31

30 And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book;³¹ but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

Contextually, we probably ought to understand the “many other signs” here in v. 30 as referring to the *post-resurrection appearances* Jesus made to them.

If this had come at the very end of the book, it would refer to the entire Gospel.

But John goes on to tell *another* story about a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus in the next verses.

So is best to understand what he’s saying here as referring to how Jesus revealed Himself between the resurrection and His ascension.

Everything John’s recorded about the appearances of the Risen Christ is aimed at producing faith in Him as the Messiah & God.

While this is a tad technical – I want to point out something in v. 31 that will help us understand the Christian life.

John writes, “**These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.**”

The first “believe” is in the *aorist* tense, which means simple completed action.

It looks to a moment in time when a thing happens, & it’s done.

It’s John’s goal to see his readers come to an instant in time when they turn from unbelief to faith in Christ.

Really, it’s fitting that John would say such a thing in a passage which has just shown when HE & the other disciples crossed over to saving faith in Jesus.

The Christian life *begins* with an *instantaneous conversion*, a moment in time when a person’s will surrenders to God.

It might take months or years for them to come to that point, but eventually it arrives and they step from death to life.

This is why we do altar calls. They afford someone the opportunity to give public testimony to the event of their salvation.

Raising a hand, going forward to pray with someone, repeating a prayer with an evangelist or counselor doesn’t save anyone.

These are merely vehicles by which those who’ve *had* a crisis of decision can declare their reception of God’s grace.

But that crisis of decision, that moment in time when one crosses over from death to life, leads to an *abiding place of faith*.

That’s why the 2nd use of the word ‘believe’ in v. 31 is in the *present* tense:

“ . . . and that [continually] **believing you may have life in His name.**”

The initial event of being born again is meant to usher us into *a life of on-going faith.*

Just as we step from death into life the moment we surrender our will to God, we can *grow* in our *experience* of that life by constant, continuing surrender.

O. Breakfast in Galilee 21:1-14

¹After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and in this way He showed Himself:

Since we covered verses 1-14 on Sunday, I'll just make some *additional* comments tonight.

First of all, sorting out the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus to the disciples can be a little tricky.

None of the Gospel writers gives anything close to a complete chronological record of the events between the resurrection & the ascension.

So it takes some detective work to sort things out.

In v. 14, John tells us this was Jesus' 3rd appearance to the disciples.

V. 1 begins, “After these things;” a phrase referring to a *short* passage of time.

Ch. 20 showed us the first 2 appearances of Jesus to the disciples; the 1st was on Rez. Sunday w/o Thomas, & the 2nd was a week later when he was there.

This story probably took place during the 2nd or 3rd week after the Rez.

Here's where things get sticky . . .

1) Jesus told them they were to *wait in Jerusalem* until they had been filled with the Holy Spirit, which we know took place on the Day of Pentecost, 7 weeks later.

2) But He also told them they were to meet Him on a certain hill in Galilee *first*.

So, which is it: Wait in Jerusalem or go to Galilee?

It's both. Pentecost was far enough off that a quick trip North, back to the place where there were hundreds of devoted followers, could be easily squeezed in.

Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 15 that at one of the appearances Jesus made after His resurrection there were over 500 people.

A hillside in Galilee is certainly where that took place.

It was crucial the original 11 disciples be at this meeting in Galilee so Jesus could affirm their leadership among the others.

²Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together.

Only 7 *disciples* are mentioned here.

Matthew tells us in 28:16 that when the disciples went to meet Jesus on the hill in Galilee at the *appointed* time, it was *all 11*.

This is not the same event. This takes place *before* that.

³Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We are going with you also.” They went out and immediately got into

the boat, and that night they caught nothing.

If you weren't here Sunday, get a CD of the message for why Peter decided to go fishing.

It would have been easy for them to find a boat since John & James' father Zebedee owned a successful commercial fishing business on Lake Gennesaret, called here the Sea of Tiberias.

But a whole night of fishing yielded nada.

4But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. **5**Then Jesus said to them, **“Children, have you any food?”** They answered Him, **“No.”**

6And He said to them, **“Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.”** So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish. **7**Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, **“It is the Lord!”** Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on *his* outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea. **8**But the other disciples came in the little boat (for they were not far from land, but about two hundred cubits), dragging the net with fish.

They were only about 100 yards offshore when at dawn someone called from shore – “Hey kiddos – fishing not so hot, huh?”

“Why don't you try the right side of the boat?”

They don't know it's Jesus, so why did they take the advice & cast their net?

Well, being that it's dawn, they assume his angle of view sees a school of fish they can't.

There's a school there all right, but it's not that this stranger on shore can see it. He's controlling it.

In fact, He's been chasing fish away from their net all night so that they can learn an important lesson.

When they do cast at His direction, the net is suddenly filled with big, fat fish.

Immediately John is reminded of a similar event 3 years before and says, “That's gotta' be Jesus!”

Peter stands up from hauling on the net, says, “Huh? Oh!” grabs his cloak, & hops out of the boat to swim to shore.

The reason Peter put his outer garment on even though he was planning on going swimming was because he was going to be greeting the Lord when he got to shore, and such a greeting required that a person be fully clothed.

You see, in that time & culture, a greeting carried a much deeper personal meaning than the modern custom of saying “Hello.”

For us, “Hi,” is little more than way of saying, “I know you're there, & everything's okay between us.”

But among the Jews of Jesus' day, a greeting carried a strong religious element.

When you said, “Shalom: to someone, you were wishing them the blessing of a comprehensive peace that resulted in both safety & plenty.

Really, when you said “Shalom” you were extending to that person the blessing of God with Whom you were in covenant.

You were saying, "May the covenant-blessings of Yahweh be upon you."
This is why Jews only greeted other Jews, and only those they considered worthy of receiving the blessing of God.

Because such greetings were understood as religious blessings, it required the proper attire.

If someone entered your home unannounced & found you dressed in too casual a manner to receive company, then you'd put the proper attire on before giving your greeting.

This helps explain Jesus' instructions in Matthew 10:12-13:

12 And when you go into a household, greet it. **13** If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you.

It also sheds important light on what has been for some a very troubling passage in 2 John 1:10-11:

10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; **11** for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.

The idea is that since greeting someone places God's blessing on them, greeting a heretic would only benefit the enemy.

9 Then, as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. **10** Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have just caught." **11** Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not broken.

Since Peter was already wet, it made sense he'd hop into the boat, untie the net from the rail, jump back into the water, then drag the bulging net to shore.

As we saw Sunday, John's recording there were 153 large fish taken in an unbroken net ought to be understood as nothing more than the account of a real commercial fisherman.

I got this email after the message last Sunday . . .

Dear Pastor, I wanted to let you know how special this morning's message was to me. You see, I've been a commercial fisherman my entire adult life - 17 years. I believe my occupation is one of the most misunderstood vocations in the world today. I fish the channel year round with one crewman in the winter and work alone in the summer. It's an amazing way of life; challenging, unpredictable, & uncertain. Commercial fishermen are fiercely independent, persistent, & resilient. With each passing season I struggle with purpose in my profession. More regulation, higher operating costs, no guarantees (or benefits), feelings of isolation at sea. But I wouldn't trade it for anything. You hit the nail right in the "sweet spot". Fishing is what I was called to do, and really by accident. But I belong to Him, and fishing doesn't make me who I am. Should you need any fish stories for a sermon, I've got plenty. And I do count my fish, every one of them. That's my job.

Fish were counted so that each worker would get his share.

And it's part of the fisherman's code to keep track of exceptional catches & tell stories about it for the rest of their days.

This was a miraculous haul, and John simply jotted down the details.

But there's no end to the theories commentators come up with attaching some kind of spiritual significance to the number of fish.

One of the more popular views is that the ancients believed there were 153 species of fish.

So this catch was God's way of saying as Apostles they were to go out and make disciples of all nations.

The problem is – we have *not a shred* of evidence from antiquity that the ancients believed there were 153 species of fish!

Another said that 153 is the sum of 1 through 17.

17 is the sum of 10 & 7; 10 referring to the 10 commandments & 7 to the fruit of the Spirit.

Okay – what does that have to do with a net full of fish?

Another group of commentators have pointed to the number of dots in an equilateral triangle with 17 dots to a side.

Guess how many total dots = 153!

And of course, the connection to the fish they caught is real clear there!

Then there's the view that 153 is the sum of 76 and 77.

In Greek, Simon has a numerical equivalent of 76 while the word for fish equals 77.

This clearly points to Simon Peter as the consummate fisherman.

Oh, but wait – he'd just spent a whole night fishing and caught, what?

Then there's the view that this is a reference to the Trinity.

3 times 51 = 153!

Where does the 51 come from? Well we need to multiply 3 by something if we want to make this a reference to the Trinity.

And last for us, but by no means last in the list of suggestions for what

153 points to, is the idea that it's the sum of 100, representing

Gentiles, 50, representing Israel, & 3, referring to the Trinity.

Folks, if this is the best these brilliant scholars can come up with, then we ought to conclude nothing more is meant by this 153 than that John is recording a miraculous catch.

If he'd meant us to see some deeper meaning here, certainly he would have given us a better clue.

12 Jesus said to them, **“Come and eat breakfast.”** Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, **“Who are You?”**—knowing that it was the Lord.

We talked about the *reason* for their hesitation Sunday.

13 Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish. **14** This is now the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead.

When they delayed to step forward and join Him for breakfast, He took it to them. They then sat down and ate .

P. Jesus Restores Peter 21:15-19

Since Pastor Jeff is going to teach on the next vs. in a few weeks, we'll just read over them tonight.

15 So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, 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 again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, 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 Jonah, 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 all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep."

18 Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish." **19** This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me."

[Sunday.]

Q. John's Final Testimony 21:20-25

20 Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?"

John is so devoted to not mentioning his own name that he gives this rather lengthy reference; but it's a reference filled with his connection to Jesus – not a bad way to identify yourself!

It would seem that when Jesus said to Peter in v. 19, "Follow Me," He actually stood up and started walking.

Peter does so, and turns around to see how else of the 7 is tagging along. John is.

21 Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, "But Lord, what about this man?"

Jesus has told Peter what *his* fate will be in v. 18 – he will die a martyr's death on a cross of his own. Peter asks what *John's* future holds.

22 Jesus said to him, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me."

John's fate was none of Peter's concern.

The only reason why Jesus told Peter his ultimate end was because Peter was so *doubtful* of his ability to follow the Lord.

So Jesus encouraged him with a glimpse of his end.

John's fate was an all together different matter & none of Peter's business.

If God willed that John remain alive until the Second Coming, then that's what would be.

The key for Peter was to stay focused on the Lord.

Peter seems to be one of those people who are unduly influence by others.

It was when he was surrounded by unbelievers in the high priest's courtyard that he denied knowing Jesus.

It was when religious legalists from Jerusalem visited the church at Antioch that Peter would no longer sit & eat with Gentiles.

While close fellowship with other right-on, mature believers can be a great spur to our walk, the failure of others ought not stumble or halt our progress in Christ. Friends are going to fall. Leaders are going to mess up. Pastors & elders are going to go sideways & blow it.

These things hurt, but they mustn't hinder our movement forward in Christ.

We probably all known people who fell way from the Lord because someone they looked to as an example blew it.

They blame their loss of faith on that other person's fall.

But all it did was reveal the weakness of their faith.

How does your failure or my failure prove God's not still worthy of our love & devotion?

There is no connection there – yet many people blame their lack of abiding faith in Christ on someone else's moral failure.

Jesus said to Peter, "John's got his own path and future. The only thing you need to concern yourself with is that YOU, SIMON PETER, follow Me!"

23 Then this saying went out among the brethren that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?"

Reading heaps of silliness into the text is nothing new.

John says they were doing way back then.

Because Jesus made the supposition of God's will for John to remain alive till the Second Coming, some jumped to the conclusion he was either immortal or the Second Coming was close at hand.

John corrected this goofy idea by putting it in the right context.

Jesus never said any such thing. His point was that Peter was to take thought for his own life & walk and not worry about John.

24 This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true.

Many scholars believe the "we" here is the endorsement of the Ephesians elders where John wrote this Gospel.

They're saying the things John recorded were bits & pieces of the genuine Apostolic witness which was in ample supply at this time.

25 And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they

were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen.

John had centered His story on filling in some of the details the other Gospels of M,M&L had left out.

But he by no means exhausted the record.

All he does is scratch the surface of all Jesus did & said.

This last comment would seem to open the door to other Gospels – books that guys like Dan Brown & *The DaVinci Code* say existed but were rejected by men with an agenda of promoting a skewed picture of the life of Christ.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

The books they would have us accept as viable accounts of the Life of Christ are all late 2nd Century to mid 4th Century Gnostic fables.

There isn't a single reputable scholar who sees it any other way.

The reason *why* the Early Church whole-heartedly accepted M,M,L&J was because they were written in the mid-first Century, within just a few decades of the events, and were penned by the people given as their authors.

That was known by all.

The Gnostic Gospels are much different in that they were written hundreds of years later & could not have been penned by the people they're named after, Thomas, Philip, Mary Magdalene, because they were long dead.